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Empowerment and Self-Efficacy in the  
Lives of Four Emerging Bilingual Assistants  
in an Additive Bilingual Program

by Lonna S. Summers

2008

Submitted to the graduate degree program in  
Curriculum and Instruction and the Graduate  
Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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of Four Emerging Bilingual Assistants in an Additive Bilingual Program

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Lonna S. Summers

B.A. Southwestern College, 2000

Submitted to the graduate degree program in Curriculum and Instruction  
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version of the following thesis:

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## ABSTRACT

This research presents an ethnographic understanding of the personal and professional lives of four emerging bilingual assistants (EBAs) who designed and implemented an additive bilingual program in preschool classrooms. Through a qualitative design that included participant observations, interviews, visual and narrative constructions, and video recording, I explore the EBAs' professional roles (including duties, challenges, collaboration with teachers, support, relationships and educational goals). I then examine their personal and family challenges, language ideologies, and changing practices and beliefs outside the school domain. These themes are analyzed through a conceptual framework that merges Freire's concept of empowerment with Bandura's notion of self-efficacy. My findings suggest that school and home domains intersect, transforming what the EBAs, their families, and friends believe about language, education, and themselves. I conclude that the effects of the EB program extend beyond the classroom and reach the lives of the EBAs, their family, friends, and community.

## PREFACE

The path leading to this thesis began back when I was a junior in high school, sitting through the required Spanish class. “*Tengo dos hermanas y un hermano. Me gustan las hamburguesas. Soy de Kansas.*” Growing up in Western Kansas, I could hardly imagine that one day, Spanish would become more than isolated dialogues from the Spanish textbook. I continued with Spanish at Southwestern College, because I didn’t know what else to study and I figured that knowing Spanish might someday be useful. My teachers and Rick Gregory, a former Peace Corps volunteer, encouraged me to study abroad saying that it would change my perspective of the world. They persisted until I finally gave up and planned to spend a semester in Mérida, Venezuela.

Once there, I soon began to understand the journey of a second language learner. Even though I had studied Spanish for four years, I was frustrated and fatigued from trying to communicate with people, and it took so much patience and courage just to talk to someone. I needed time to process and think, but frequently the conversation sped past me or others talked for me. I felt the frustration of not being able to express my ideas or contribute to a conversation without passing every sentence through a mental grammar check. Before long I met two Venezuelans, Raúl and Julio, who in addition to helping me learn Spanish, taught me to dance *tambores* and to choose an *arepa* stand that would not make me sick the next day. As they continued to help me understand the language and culture, I made a commitment to help non-native English speakers when I returned to the United States. A year later, I

decided to study for a semester in Mexico so that I could improve my language skills and learn about the Mexican culture, to be more effective in helping people.

Upon completing my undergraduate degree in English and Spanish, my focus turned to fulfilling the commitment I made in Venezuela. I taught English to elementary, high school, and college students, and to adult learners in the United States and Mexico. I also taught high school and college Spanish courses. Teaching reinforced the idea that education equals opportunity and empowerment. I began to see education as a means for community development and the key to fighting discrimination, poverty, and ignorance. My experiences in teaching increased my awareness of the social and political concerns facing English language learners and immigrants.

I entered the Curriculum and Instruction Master's program at the University of Kansas to better understand these issues and to combine my concern for the social and educational of immigrants with my academic and research interests. Fortunately, I was able to explore these topics through my involvement in the Early Reading First grant and the EB program, resulting in this thesis.

The process of completing a Master's degree and thesis is a collaborative experience involving the efforts and responses of many people. I want to express my gratitude to my colleagues, friends, family whose support and encouragement kept me going through my education. In acknowledging those who have helped me get to this point, I first thank my teachers in Kansas, Venezuela, and Mexico. They have invested many hours and much energy in providing me with a quality education.



Teachers often have a thankless job, but I send my sincere appreciation and admiration to each of them. Second, I thank my students, who have in so many ways been my teachers. They showed me what educational settings should look like, where both students and teacher are learning together.

I am grateful to those involved in the Early Reading First grant who allowed me to conduct and complete this research in the classrooms. In addition, my appreciation and respect goes to my thesis committee members. Dr. Lizette Peter has been diligent in her support and guidance as my advisor, committee chair, and teacher. She consistently challenges me to think critically and pushes me to dream of more. In my second semester as a graduate student, Dr. Peter held up a book in class and said, “This is not out of the realm of possibility for any of you.” I immediately wrote it in my notebook and dreamed of the day when I could do something comparable. Thank you, Dr. Peter, for inspiring that belief in me. As my supervisor, colleague, and friend, Dr. Karen Jorgensen has taught me a lot about the type of teacher I want to be. She has showed me how to encourage and inspire people to become more than they could imagine for themselves. She is friendly, generous, and open while also being dedicated and knowledgeable. Thank you Dr. J. I also thank Dr. Jennifer Ng for serving on my committee and for presenting issues and concerns I had not even considered. Her questions and comments made me view my own research in a new light. I thank Dr. Don Stull who introduced me to ethnography and made many valuable comments and revisions on early drafts of this thesis.

I am especially grateful to the four Emerging Bilingual Assistants who shared their stories and experiences with me. They opened their hearts and homes and introduced me to their friends and families. I thank Ana, Gaby, Penny, and Rosa for teaching me about dedication, enthusiasm, patience, and perseverance. Their friendship and professional collaboration meant a great deal to me, and I have learned much from them during the year. ¡*Gracias!*

I would also like to thank many people who have encouraged me along the process of completing my Master's program and thesis. I am grateful to Argelia, Misty, Ann, Crystal, Omar, Jammy, and Rigo and to friends at the KTA for their constant encouragement and support. I also thank my parents, Bill and Bev Summers, for teaching me to work hard and for encouraging me to make my own decisions. I thank my sister Tara Bowman for keeping me giggling when I really didn't feel like it. I am grateful for the support and understanding from Scott, Tim, Mariah, and Sonya when they repeatedly heard, "I'm sorry. I have to study." To my brother, Andy, who encouraged me to do what made me come alive and who made me laugh by jokingly referring to this project as my "feces." I thank my sister, Treva, for believing in me even when I doubted my own abilities. Lastly, I thank my grandparents, Francis and Vesta Cox, and Ecil Summers for teaching me to listen to people's stories.

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

-- Marianne Williamson

A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of a Course in Miracles

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

-- Margaret Mead

*We have a chance to make a difference. We are the ones that are going to help them have a chance. We are the ones who can give them a chance.*  
—Rosa, emerging bilingual assistant

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Like other schools in the United States, Kansas schools increasingly serve students from linguistically diverse backgrounds. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2004) project that between 2000 and 2050, 88 percent of the population increase will be children of new immigrants, many of whom will speak a language other than English at home (Young & Hadaway, 2006, p. 6). With an increasing number of students who speak little or no English, English-as-a-second-language (ESL) programs have developed throughout preK-12 classrooms to teach English to these students. ESL programs are based on the premise that to be successful in education, students must first learn English.

It has been well-documented that bilingual and English language learners (ELLs) often are marginalized or overlooked in mainstream education (Nieto, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999; Igoa, 1995). ESL students are not adequately served by the educational system in the United States (Espinoza-Herold, 2003); they are separated from other students and put into classrooms where teachers do not have adequate training, resources, or materials (Gitlin, Buendía, Crosland, & Doumbia, 2003). In many ways the education of ESL students has been one of miseducation. Eisner (2002) explains, “Miseducational experiences are those that thwart or hamper our ability to have further experiences or to cope intelligently with problems in a particular arena of activity” (p. 37). The statistics on graduation rates, achievement

tests, enrollment in college preparatory classes, and grade point averages demonstrate that ESL students are not adequately served by the educational system in the United States and indicate a tradition of miseducation (Espinoza-Herold, 2003).

This critical view of schooling of culturally and linguistically diverse learners sees schools as an extension of our society that tend to replicate the ideas we value (Eisner, 2002). “English Only” laws give power to English by explicitly declaring it the official language of the state and schools. At the same time, these laws devalue other languages by implying that they are somehow “unofficial.” Schools typically echo these positions and function mostly as monolingual English environments, and those students who have not obtained a working knowledge of the language of instruction are denied access to education. When students speak a language other than English, teachers tend to view them as deficient (Nieto, 2002) and students are described in terms of what they lack, rather than the language skills and knowledge they bring to the classroom. Valenzuela (1999) explains that language minority students are labeled “‘limited English proficient’ rather than as ‘Spanish dominant’ or as potentially bilingual. Their fluency is construed as a ‘barrier’ that needs to be overcome” (p. 173). In many schools across the United States ESL programs are charged with the task of helping language minority students learn English as a means to overcome this barrier of language.

There is a spectrum of possibilities for ESL program designs, ranging from the “sink or swim” model where only English is used in instruction, to transitional bilingual programs (where the students’ language is used to help them make the

transition from their languages to English), to two-way bilingual programs in which both English speakers and language minority children learn a second language (Tabors, 1997). Despite the variety of program designs, most approaches view “language diversity is an illness to be cured” (Nieto, 2002, p. 87). They avoid using the home language or use it only as a “bridge” to learning English (Nieto). The students’ first languages are not supported once they gain some knowledge base in their new language, and the consequence is that language minority students “go from monolingualism in their home language, to active bilingualism (when they are developing both languages), to passive bilingualism (when they stop producing their home language, although they will still understand it), and then back to monolingualism, but now in English” (Tabors, 1997, pp. 140-141). Unfortunately, part of the hidden curriculum of these programs is for students to lose their home language, and consequently, their ties to their home culture.

The traditional view of the immigrant experience in the United States has been one of assimilation in which the “identification with one culture represents a corresponding reduction in the other” (Parra Cardona, Busby, & Wampler, 2004). A common discourse among educators, policy-makers, and community members is that for one to be productive in the United States, one must become “American.” Essentially, immigrants are expected to adopt the customs, traditions, and language of mainstream America while rejecting their own culture, ethnic identity, and native language (Parra Cardona, et al.). This assimilationist view of the immigrant experience prevails in U.S. educational system too. Part of the covert curriculum in

schools is to teach all students the dominate culture (Eisner, 2002; Apple, 1995) and more explicitly, to push language minority students to assimilate (Gitlin, Buendía, Crosland, & Doumbia, 2003). In this context, bilingualism and biliteracy rarely are considered the optimal end of the immigrant experience (Pease-Alvarez, 2002).

The loss of their home language and native culture among language minority students is a form of “subtractive” schooling. “School subtracts resources from youth in two major ways. First, it dismisses their definition of education which not only thoroughly grounded in Mexican culture, but also approximates the optimal definition of education advanced by Noddings (1984) and other caring theorists. Second, subtractive schooling encompasses subtractively assimilationist policies and practices that are designed to divest Mexican students of their culture and language” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 20). While Valenzuela specifically speaks about Mexican students, the same holds true for students from other cultures. The probable consequence of subtractive schooling is a loss of identity for students (Nieto, 2002). Igoa (1995) explains this loss of identity as a cultural split, where the students have to “behave one way at home and another way at school” (p. 107). She further explains, “A cultural split is a wound, because part of oneself is lost to the other part” (p. 107). Obviously, the effects of subtractive schooling extend into the academic realm where a tradition of underachievement becomes the norm.

Poststructuralists challenge the assimilationist perspective of the immigrant experience and maintain that students’ languages and cultures are assets in the classroom, not deficits. Bilingualism is the new cultural capital, allowing

immigrants, particularly Latino immigrants, to manipulate their identities and language skills to function equally in mainstream and native cultures (Trueba, 2002). There is an increased focus not only bilingualism, but also biculturalism, or an “integrated identification,” which describes “individuals who have been able to incorporate elements from both cultures and whose identity is based on such integration” (Parra Cardona, Busby, & Wampler, 2004, p. 331). New perspectives challenge the widespread idea that bilingualism is a stage of transition from one monolingualism to another (Pease-Alvarez, 2002), and now, many researchers, educators, and students believe the optimal end of the immigrant experience is both bilingualism and biculturalism.

With a new understanding of the immigrant experience and a shifting perspective of the importance of bilingualism and biculturalism, research suggests that additive bilingual education is a possible solution to end the miseducation of emerging bilingual students. In these programs students add a second language while maintaining their first. When their languages and cultures are affirmed in bilingual programs, students reap the benefits; they develop a better self-esteem, there is a stronger home-school connection, and parents have opportunities to be involved in the classroom (Igoa, 1995; Freeman & Freeman, 1998). Research also shows that continued development in students’ home language and their second language encouraged “enhanced cognitive, linguistic, and academic growth” (Cummins, 2000, p. 37). In bilingual programs, the use of the students’ language not only helps them develop that language, but aids in the acquisition of English. Cummins (1981) states



that the concepts (such as print awareness or reading) that students learn in their first language transfer to the second language, making the acquisition of another language easier.

The research suggests additive bilingual programs are needed to help students who have, according to tradition, been taught to fail. With an eye on current research on the subject of bilingualism, this study examines the results of an additive solution, the emerging bilingual program. Though the program was created to help the emerging bilingual students<sup>1</sup>, the four women who designed and implemented it also benefited and they became the focus of this study.

My thesis explores the lives of the four emerging bilingual assistants (EBAs) involved in the emerging bilingual program. Using ethnographic methods, I examine their struggles, challenges and support systems and explore how their professional and personal experiences intersect. The objective is to explore their roles in the education of emerging bilingual students, and understand the effects of the program through their own perspectives. Two conceptual frameworks guide this study, the first, builds on a network of related literature about bilingual paraeducators, and the second, considers the ideas of self-efficacy and empowerment. Through the presentation of data and analysis, I demonstrate how the benefits of an emerging

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<sup>1</sup> Most ESL programs describe the students in terms of the language they lack, rather than focusing on their first language dominance and their potential to become bilingual and bicultural. I used the terms “language minority students” or “ESL students” in the discussion of traditional forms of education to reflect the literature and educational situation of students; however, I use the term “Emerging Bilingual” (EB) to refer to the students in this study who are part of an additive bilingual program that recognizes their skills and pushes them to reach their potential.

bilingual program reach not just the students, but the EBAs, their families, friends, and community.

### Emerging Bilingual Program

The Emerging Bilingual (EB) program was created and implemented as part of an Early Reading First grant, called Topeka Creating Access to Reading Excellence and Success (Topeka CARES) in Topeka, Kansas. The overarching goals of the project are to improve the basic skills that children need to read (including oral language, phonological and print awareness, and alphabet knowledge), expand teacher knowledge of literacy rich environments, and provide a comprehensive and ongoing professional development program. Though Topeka teachers and paraeducators are familiar with the ESL programs established in the school system, they have little or no exposure to an additive bilingual program, such as the emerging bilingual program.

The program employs four emerging bilingual assistants who speak to the Spanish-speaking children mainly in Spanish to help them maintain their home languages. They also introduce Spanish to monolingual English speakers through activities, songs, and book sharing. The EBAs serve as interpreters in the classroom and provide a valuable link between home and school.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term “emerging bilingual assistants” for the four participants in this study to emphasize their roles in an additive bilingual program. Most bilingual paraeducators help with ESL programs, encouraging their students to develop their skills in English. The emerging bilingual assistants, however, help all students achieve bilingualism. Though the job of EBA in some ways resembles that of a bilingual paraeducator, the difference in terms is used to highlight the differences in their positions and goals.

I came to the Early Reading First grant as a graduate research assistant to collaborate with Dr. Karen Jorgensen to plan and implement the Emerging Bilingual Program. With other members of the professional development team, we present monthly seminars to classroom teachers, paraeducators, and EBAs. I also meet with the EBAs weekly where we share experiences, connect classroom observations to language acquisition theory, develop lesson plans with content and language objectives, and discuss topics such as immigration, language, and culture (see more detailed description of professional development topics in Appendix A). These weekly meetings are often a mixture of Spanish and English as the EBAs are encouraged to express themselves in the language that seems most comfortable to them at the time. Dr. Jorgensen attends these meetings about once a month and provides additional expertise in biliteracy. I provide in-class support for the EBAs as they instruct during whole group activities and EB pull-out sessions. With Dr. Jorgensen, I have conducted research in the classroom related to teachers and paraeducators' attitudes about home language maintenance.

Much of what Dr. Jorgensen and I do is a team effort; however, this particular study is of my own design and implementation. Naturally, the access to the classrooms and to the research participants stems from my position as a graduate research assistant with the EB program. While acknowledging and giving due credit to Dr. Jorgensen for her work with the program, the research design, collection of data, analysis, and presentation of the findings presented in this thesis are the result of independent research.

When I first became involved with the Early Reading First grant, I was mainly interested in studying language use and developing language ideologies among preschool students. I wanted to know how this additive bilingual program would influence the students' language preference, expressions of identity, and interactions. However, I soon realized these themes were relevant to the EBAs, not just to the students. I observed that through professional development and classroom experiences, the EBAs became more aware of their language use, discovered aspects of their hidden language ideologies, and transformed their own opinions and beliefs about bilingual education. The EBAs began to challenge the deficit and subtractive ways of thinking about language and culture, a view that states to be successful, one must assimilate. I shifted my research focus from the emerging bilingual students to the four women who helped implement the emerging bilingual program. I hypothesized that from EBAs' involvement in an additive bilingual program, they were simultaneously teaching the students and themselves about the value of their native language, education, and expression of self. After completing a pilot study about their challenges in their professional and personal lives, relationships with teachers, attitudes and beliefs about bilingual education, and educational plans, I decided to expand the research scope and explore how their positions with the program influences their own families and friends. I wanted to understand the EBAs' experiences and perspectives of being involved in a program that purports respect for language diversity.

Current research on bilingual paraeducators tends to focus on the professional duties of paraeducators and their challenges during school or while advancing to teacher certification programs (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Sandoval-Lucero, 2006; Waldschmidt, 2002). These studies examine what paraeducators bring to the classrooms, their “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), and how they use this knowledge in instruction and interactions with the students. This study contributes to existing research in several ways. Though I also examine the professional lives of the EBAs and their funds of knowledge, I first, extend the research by exploring the roles and struggles in their personal lives that influence their professional work. Second, while most existing research focuses on the bilingual paraeducators who work in ESL environments, my research focuses on EBAs who work in an additive bilingual program under very different circumstances. Third, I stretch the research domain and explore how the EBAs professional roles influence their personal lives, including their ideas, interactions, and practices among friends and family. This study contributes to a richer understanding of the effects of additive bilingual programs, effects that reach not just the students, but also teachers, families, and the community at large.

The data suggests that because of their involvement in the EB program, the EBAs actively share the concepts related to additive bilingualism with those around them. As they contribute to the community’s discourse about home language maintenance, bilingualism, and education, they experience an increase in their self-efficacy beliefs and begin to view themselves as agents of change who empower both

the students and themselves. In the end, this study demonstrates that the benefits of an additive bilingual program extend far beyond the classroom.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain a holistic understanding of the personal and professional lives of the four EBAs involved in the grant, including their roles, struggles, challenges, and support systems. I realize a “complete” picture of a situation is never really complete, and all knowledge is situated, positioned so as to include some aspects and not others. Yet, in this study, I show how the personal and professional experiences of the EBAs intersect, and I explore how the nature of these experiences influences and transforms what they believe. I also investigate how the EBAs’ experiences in the classroom spill over into their personal lives, affecting their friends and families’ ideas about language and education. As I examine these situations and experiences, I consider the EBAs’ increasing beliefs of self-efficacy and empowerment.

### Research Questions

The purpose and research questions for this study emerged as the EBAs began their work in the classrooms, asked questions, and reported their experiences to me. As I learned more about what they were facing in the classroom, my focus and purpose shifted. In the beginning, the EBAs mostly talked about their challenges in the classroom, and then as the time passed, they talked more and more of the

importance of education and changes outside of the classroom. Through the process of conducting ethnography, my research questions evolved with new information and insight. Agar (1996) explains, “In ethnography, . . . you learn something (“collect some data”), then you try to make sense out of it (“analysis”), then you go back to see if the interpretation makes sense in light of new experiences (“collect more data”), then you refine your interpretation (“more analysis”), and so on. The process is dialectic, not linear” (p. 62). My final research questions are a product of this ongoing process.

In my thesis, I will address four main research areas: professional roles of the EBAS, personal experiences, intersection of the two, changing beliefs and practices, and perceived efficacy. Each research focus generates additional questions and areas of interest as described:

#### *Professional Roles of the EBAS*

- What are the professional roles of the EBAs?
- What struggles and challenges do they find in these roles?
- What support and methods do they use to overcome these them?

#### *Personal Experiences*

- What challenges do the EBAs face in their roles outside of the classroom?
- What support systems do they rely on?

#### *Intersection of the Professional Roles and Personal Experiences*

- How do the personal and professional lives of the EBAs intersect and influence each other?

- How do experiences with teachers, students, and the EBAs' families shape the ideologies of the EBAs?
- How do the personal lives of the EBAs shape their professional lives?

#### *Changing Beliefs and Practices*

- What do EBAs express about their language use and language ideologies?
- What are the nature and effects, if any, of professional development and classroom experience on the expressed ideologies or practices of the EBAs?

#### *Perceived Efficacy*

- What do the EBAs believe about their abilities to produce a long-term effect in the students and community?

By using ethnography to answer these questions, my intent was to understand and present an “emic” perspective of the EBAs lives. Through the telling of their experiences, often by using their words, I document the EBAs' stories and permit a deeper understanding of their valuable contribution to education. I also reveal the process of increased self-efficacy and empowerment.

### Organization of Chapters

This thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the state of education for EB students and illustrates the need for bilingual education. It then briefly outlines the goals for this thesis. Chapter Two discusses the conceptual framework for this thesis and examines relevant literature



about bilingual paraeducators, providing background information about their professional roles in the classroom. Chapter Three introduces the four EBAs and details the methods of research used in this study. Chapter Four highlights my findings about the EBAs' role in the classrooms and details their roles, challenges, support systems, relationships with students, and education. Chapter Five focuses on the EBAs' personal experiences and support systems, and it also describes how the effects of the EB program extend to the EBAs' families, friends, and community. This chapter concludes by exploring the EBAs' expressed self-efficacy beliefs in the education of EB students. The final chapter summarizes the findings and provides a discussion about the findings as it relates to current research. The chapter also discusses the implications of these findings and gives direction in the effective use of bilingual paraeducators in the education of EB students. It concludes with questions and topics to consider in future research.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Two conceptual frameworks guide this study. The first conceptual framework is rooted in the literature about bilingual paraeducators, and the second is based on the ideas of empowerment (Freire, 1984) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982). Together these frameworks have explanatory power in understanding the professional and personal lives of the EBAs.

Current research describes the role of bilingual paraeducators within the school system and then recommends a plan of action for utilizing the paraeducators' skills and knowledge to the benefit of students. I began my research looking in the same general direction, towards the challenges and support within the school context. Over time, my research focus grew to include topics related to the EBAs' family, friends, and community.

The works presented in this literature review were selected, because together, they present a detailed picture of the roles of paraeducators. Some works were chosen because they provide a thorough discussion of the traditional roles of paraeducators, and others because the authors, specifically Lilia Monzó and Robert Rueda, seem to be at the forefront in research about bilingual paraeducators (see Monzó & Rueda, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Rueda & Monzó, 2002). Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006) not only provide information about bilingual paraeducators, but also offer valuable insight into ethnographic methods with visual and narrative emphases. The work of Sandoval-Lucero (2006) is especially important in showing the impact of collaboration and mastery experiences on the self-efficacy beliefs of bilingual

paraeducators, a theme that was beginning to emerge from my data as well. Together these selected works coalesce to form the conceptual framework which informs this thesis.

The review of the literature is organized into seven major themes including an overview of paraeducators in education, bilingual paraeducator job description, collaboration with teachers, shared experiences, special relationships, barriers to education, and looking towards the future. I selected these themes because they seemed to be the most prevalent in the literature and the most relevant to my own research.

Research about paraeducators focuses largely on their roles in the classroom. Studies explore their contributions to instruction and describe their positions, duties, and responsibilities. They also highlight the shared experiences between paraeducators and students, experiences that strengthen their relationships. In addition, research reveals the support paraeducators receive as they overcome barriers to higher education and to becoming teachers themselves. Lastly, researchers call for a redefinition of the role of paraeducators and recommend how paraeducators can be used more effectively in classrooms.

### Paraeducators in Education

“A paraeducator is a person who works in a school in an instructional capacity alongside school professionals and is supervised by the certificated or licensed professionals who hold ultimate responsibility for the student and programmatic

outcomes” (French, 1999). In the 1950’s, the employment of paraeducators began as a way to alleviate teacher shortages. Schools recruited and trained women with college experience to assist in routine classroom tasks (Pickett, 2003). In the 1960’s and 1970’s, there was an increased interest in providing services to children and youth with disabilities, and with it came an increase in the number of paraeducators working in schools to provide individualized instruction. According to Pickett, in the 1980’s, the support and training for paraeducators began to fade, yet paraeducators continued to provide instructional support. Pickett claims that the number of paraeducators in the recent past has continued to increase due to ongoing efforts to address the needs of children with disabilities, and children who come from diverse cultural and language backgrounds. She also cites the need for paraeducators to address teacher shortages. Many preK-12 classrooms rely on paraeducators to provide instructional assistance and other support in special education, bilingual and ESL, reading and math, school to work, transition and early childhood programs (French).

### Bilingual Paraeducator Job Description

The literature on the work of paraeducators suggests that mainstream classroom teachers largely define the role of paraeducators in classrooms. The teacher guides them in what they expect, whether providing instruction to the students, managing classroom behaviors, or preparing materials. Because the teachers’ and students’ needs are different in each classroom, the role of

paraeducators varies. In some classrooms, the paraeducator may be involved in instructional tasks, while in other rooms they mainly do clerical work (Weiss, 1994; Sandoval-Lucero, 2006). Weiss (1994) found that the roles of the paraeducators vary greatly from one room to the next. “One aide might be expected to perform equal teaching tasks while the aide next door may be restricted to such menial labor as collecting lunch money or tying shoelaces” (p. 339). Paraeducators sometimes do not know exactly what the teachers want, when they want them to intervene, and what the boundaries are (Weiss). This inconsistent and flexible job description brings a level of confusion, anxiety, and frustration to paraeducators as they constantly try to negotiate their expected roles in the classroom, and for the teachers as they attempt to guide paraeducators in the classroom.

### *Instruction*

In classrooms across the country, bilingual paraeducators provide instruction to linguistic minority children<sup>3</sup>. In general, teachers divide the students into groups and have the paraeducator work with some while they provide instruction to others. Though the educational levels and training of the bilingual paraeducators is usually less than that of teachers, they are able to offer valuable instruction because they can provide access to education to the children through their shared language and culture. Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006), in a three-year ethnographic study, found that

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<sup>3</sup> This literature review focuses on bilingual paraeducators, but sometimes I use the term “paraeducator” to avoid unnecessary redundancy. The research that I cite, besides that of French (1999), Pickett (2003), and Weiss (1994) focus on bilingual paraeducators.

bilingual paraeducators “use their knowledge of students’ languages and cultural practices to make connections between students’ worlds and the school curricula” (p. 65). The bilingual paraeducators used what they knew about the children’s world (their language and experiences) to connect school and home and to make activities in the classroom meaningful. Paraeducators are responsible for most of the instruction of language minority students in many classrooms, because they are the ones who are making learning accessible to the students (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006).

Other researchers find that although paraeducators have knowledge of the children’s language and culture, they do not use it in instruction (Monzó & Rueda, 2003). Monzó and Rueda claim that paraeducators rarely capitalize on the funds of knowledge that they and their students bring to the classroom. In their study, they found that paraeducators’ “attempts served only to motivate; they did not add to comprehension or analysis and did not extend the concepts or ideas being discussed. Thus, they were not linked to learning” (p. 88). Yet, drawing on my own experience as a teacher and student, I argue that increased motivation does have a direct link to learning.

Paraeducators usually work with students in small group settings, which provides them the unique opportunity to have a relaxed and informal instructional setting (Pickett, 2003; Monzó & Rueda, 2001a). Monzó and Rueda (2003) found that in activities with the whole class, students were not allowed to interrupt the lesson and share personal experiences; however, in these small groups, the students could ask questions, tell stories, or relate personal information. The paraeducators in their

study used an “informal interactional style” with the students, spending more time with individual students, displaying extended wait time (giving students the opportunity to respond), and conversing with them. Monzó and Rueda (2001a) also found that paraeducators working in a small-group setting, often softened their corrections with *cariño* [with “gentle smiles, light touching, and calling students mi’ja/mi’jo (my child)”], promoting a relaxed instructional atmosphere (p. 451). Paraeducators were able to address the students in ways that classroom teachers could not due to the larger number of students and additional duties in the classroom (Monzó & Rueda, 2001a, p. 465). In their small group settings, paraeducators are able to provide the students with undivided and personal attention.

#### *Clerical support, duties, and responsibilities*

Teachers vary not only in the degree of control and amount of responsibility given to the paraeducator in instruction (Weiss, 1994, p. 339), but also in the range of tasks they ask paraeducators to complete. In two separate studies, paraeducators reported an overwhelming number of roles and duties, including photocopying, preparing materials, administering tests, grading, cleaning, supervising recess and lunch, running errands, and translating (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Rueda & Monzó, 2002).

Often paraeducators felt that they were viewed as secretaries and not “being utilized commensurately with their skills” (Sandoval-Lucero, 2006, p. 210). They had little power in instructional decisions, because teachers planned specific activities

for them to do with the students and they did not have the time or opportunity to collaborate with teachers. Although they could make small variations in the lesson, their contributions were minimal (Monzó & Rueda, 2003; Rueda & Monzó, 2002). Paraeducators also reported that teachers did not value their input as “some teachers made it clear that they were ‘the boss’ in the classroom and had difficulty sharing control” (Rueda & Monzó, 2002).

Besides providing clerical and instructional support, paraeducators also served as cultural brokers between the school and parents. Weiss explains, “Aides are intermediaries and can be useful (and used) by both school and community to facilitate communication, reduce conflict, and build a bridge between a middle-class teaching staff and the lower-class residents of the district” (p. 342). These tasks, while necessary, take valuable time away from the instruction of linguistic minority students.

From the research, it becomes apparent that paraeducators have a wealth of knowledge about language and culture, but unfortunately, are often relegated to tasks that prevent them from using their expertise. At the same time, paraeducators’ knowledge and skills sets reveal themselves to be especially valuable in building a home-school connection and forming relationships with students.



### Collaboration with teachers

While paraeducators make valuable contributions to the classrooms both in instruction and in other areas, they still hold marginal positions in schools. Weiss (1994) explains, “Aides are well aware that they are not teachers and that, although they may sometimes appear to be partners in the classroom, they are not equals” (p. 340). Researchers found that paraeducators rarely collaborated with teachers and worked alone for the most part (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Rueda & Monzó, 2002). They arrived when the students arrived and left when the students left; so there was little time for planning before or after school. Rueda and Monzó also found that most interactions between paraeducators and teachers occurred during transition times or while students were working. The opportunities to discuss, reflect, and ask questions were very limited, and much of what paraeducators learned was from watching the teacher present lessons and from trial and error (Rueda & Monzó). For the most part paraeducators were expected to answer their own questions and they were left “searching for solutions to instructional problems” (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006, p. 73). In a study by Sandoval-Lucero (2006), career paraeducators (those who planned to remain in their positions as a paraeducator) spoke less of mastery experiences and more of completing routine clerical tasks. They “did not have the opportunities to work collaboratively with the teacher to plan and deliver instruction, as those who described more mastery experiences did” (Sandoval-Lucero, 2006, p. 204). Paraeducators such as these, who were treated by the teachers as clerical

support, often expressed frustration and dissatisfaction (Rueda & Monzó, 2002, p.512).

At the same time, some teachers have figured out how to use paraeducators for the benefit of the classroom and provide them with support, the opportunity for instructional experience, and responsibility. In these classrooms, “Teachers expressed a belief that paraeducators, regardless of training, brought with them experiences and knowledge that would benefit students” (Rueda & Monzó, 2002, p. 512). The paraeducators that worked with these teachers and had the opportunity to design and implement instruction were excited about their work (Rueda & Monzó, 2002) and showed an interest in becoming teachers (Sandoval-Lucero, 2006). Predictably, Sandoval-Lucero (2006) found that paraeducators who later became teachers had more opportunities for mastery experiences, which she defines as the “opportunities to plan and deliver instruction to students collaboratively with teachers” (p. 203). In essence, teachers who understood and valued the paraeducators for all that they bring to the classroom (a knowledge of students’ language, culture, and social capital), increased the “development of their teacher efficacy and their potential for career advancement” (Sandoval-Lucero, 2006, p. 214). The research suggests that paraeducators thrive in classrooms where they receive support, encouragement, and opportunities to contribute to the classroom.

### Shared Experiences

“Most teachers in the United States are White, monolingual, middle-class females who are teaching a student body that is increasingly diverse in native language, race, ethnicity, and social class” (Nieto, 2002). Unlike those teachers, paraeducators often come from the community and have a shared language and culture as the students (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger 2006; French, 1999; Monzó & Rueda, 2001a; Pickett, 2003; Rueda & Monzó, 2002; Weiss, 1994). These shared qualities allow the paraeducators to connect to the students and care for more than their academic needs (Monzó & Rueda, 2001a). Because their own personal histories mirror those of the students, paraeducators relate to the students in different ways than mainstream classroom teachers (Monzó & Rueda, 2003). Monzó and Rueda (2001a) found that paraeducators “felt that they had a good understanding of the types of constraints and concerns that impacted many of the students they worked with because they had been raised or had lived in similar communities and had faced many of the same struggles as low-income, linguistic, and ethnic minorities” (p. 454). Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006) describe the benefits of having bilingual paraeducators in the classroom: “By having a bond of a shared language with the students—or at least a similarity in understanding the difficulty of acclimating to a new culture and language—paraeducators provided a bridge between the students’ culture and that of the school” (p. 74). In these cases, paraeducators are able to develop relationships and share experiences with the students in a way that many classroom teachers cannot.

Paraeducators often come from the community where they work, so students may see them outside the domain of school. Weiss (1994) explains, “The children’s identification with the aide is strongly based upon relationships outside the classroom. Aides are members of the adult community, friends of parents, and parents of children themselves. Thus the relationship is multiplex, often face-to-face, based upon shared experiences and expectations” (p. 341). The students see the paraeducators as members of the community and, therefore, they are more willing to trust them (Monzó & Rueda, 2003).

Just as some teachers do not know how to effectively use paraeducators in the classroom, some do not realize the potential benefits of this knowledge to instruction and relationships. “Teachers do not recognize that paraeducators have access to students’ culture and community knowledge and that they had culturally based interaction styles that might be effective with students” (Rueda & Monzó, 2002, p. 518). The challenge for teachers and paraeducators is to work together to use this knowledge for the benefit of the students.

### Special Relationships

Special relationships between paraeducators and students develop from the shared language, culture, and community. Weiss (1994) found that both teachers and paraeducators recognized the special relationship between paraeducators and students. The paraeducators made themselves available to the students, and often students brought personal issues to them rather than going to the teacher. Weiss also

found that for paraeducators “the real value of education is to build personal pride and to improve the children’s self-image” (p. 340). Similarly, Monzó and Rueda (2001a) found that paraeducators stressed the importance of *confianza*, “an important factor that enabled students to ask for assistance in academic tasks, share concerns that may affect their learning, and feel more comfortable within the school contexts” (p. 450). The paraeducators believed that *confianza* was built by “their shared language and culture and by getting to know students and interacting with them informally” (p. 450). Paraeducators emphasized the importance of listening and talking to children (Monzó & Rueda, 2001a; 2003). “They [Paraeducators] believed that, because they interacted in personal ways regularly, when there was an important issue to discuss, children would be more likely to trust them and feel comfortable confiding their problems to them, asking for assistance with the instructional task, or even engaging more fully in the activity” (p. 455). Paraeducators revealed the tendency to address the whole child, by attending to their academic, social, and emotional needs. They realized that all three aspects are important, not only for the students’ success in school but also for their futures as members in the community. While mainstream classroom teachers seemed to focus on the educational needs of the child, the paraeducators focused on the emotional and social needs of the child, “listening to their nonacademic concerns and interests, and interacting with them in ways that made them feel more comfortable in the classroom” (Monzó & Rueda, 2001a, p. 467). Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006) describe paraeducators such as these as culturally responsive teachers, “whose concerns for [their] students went beyond the

academic realm” (p. 75). In all of these studies, the paraeducators felt they needed to do more than teach, they had to address the emotional and social concerns of the children.

The benefits of these special and close relationships between students and paraeducators are many. Language minority students have someone to talk to, ask questions of, and share their problems with. This relationship also functions to strengthen the home-school connection (Igoa, 1995) and validates what the students bring to the classroom (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006), showing that paraeducators help to improve the atmosphere of schools. Weiss (1994) explains, “The changes that the aides brought to the school were in the expressive domain and concerned motivation, trust, self-esteem and a sense of identity with the school. Unfortunately, these qualities are not measured by academic achievement tests” (p. 343). Other researchers believe that the contributions of paraeducators do directly affect the quality of education students receive. The benefits are not only in the affective quality of schooling but also in the education students receive. Monzó and Rueda (2001a) point out that while the paraeducators were involved in personal conversations with the students intended to make them feel more comfortable, they also “offer much opportunity for cognitive development, as children are holding conversations with adults, learning to interact with people who are professionals, asking questions, telling stories, summarizing events, and so on” (p. 466). These are all abilities that do have an impact on academic achievement scores.

### Barriers to Education

Bilingual paraeducators encounter many barriers in pursuing their education with the goal of moving into teaching positions. Waldschmidt (2002) conducted a critical ethnography of bilingual instruction assistants in a teacher preparation program and found several barriers they face in pursuing degree and licensures: “tuition costs, work schedule, books, personal concerns, family issues, child care, transportation, English proficiency” (p. 546). The bilingual interns in the study said they would not have been able to advance in their education if the program did not offer tuition assistance and pay for their books (p. 553). A study by Sandoval-Lucero (2006) supports Waldschmidt’s findings; paraeducators cannot afford tuition and fees with low salaries, but are more likely to overcome the financial obstacle by participating in grant-funded programs that pay their tuition and fees. It only seems natural that programs such as these can help prepare paraeducators to become teachers, alleviating teacher shortages and addressing the needs of linguistic minority students. Unfortunately though, teacher preparation programs such as these are few (French, 1999).

### Looking to the Future

Paraeducators not only provide instruction, they complete other classroom tasks as well. They are a critical source of knowledge about the students’ language, cultures, and communities (Monzó and Rueda, 2001a), act as cultural brokers, and are

the teachers of the future. Unfortunately, their knowledge and skills may be overlooked as Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006) explain, “These paraeducators’ achievements were neither celebrated nor noted in the school system in which they worked. Further, their voices went unacknowledged in more general school discourse about improving the educational experiences of marginalized students” (p. 78). In hopes of improving education for all children, we must look to these bilingual paraeducators for their insight and unique contributions. Rueda and Monzó (2002) recommend that efforts be taken to promote collaboration for planning and provide professional development so that paraeducators can use their knowledge strategically. They also recommend that teacher education programs explore the idea of “funds of knowledge” and emphasize the importance of collaboration among teachers and paraeducators (Rueda and Monzó, 2003). In recognizing the skills that bilingual paraeducators bring to the classroom, more will move to teacher training programs and help educate our increasing population of linguistic minority students (Waldschmidt, 2002; Sandoval-Lucero, 2006). Waldschmidt suggests “redefining what constitutes an exemplary teacher so that cross-cultural skills, bilingual ability, and experience with racism and lower socio-economic status are included as valuable assets for working with all children” (p. 558). Through this redefinition of teaching, paraeducators will be valued for the unique skills and knowledge they bring to the classroom.

Paraeducators have a long history of contributing to the classrooms; they provide assistance with instruction and other duties. Their roles are flexible, but



usually include instruction in small groups where they develop an informal instructional style with *cariño*. The paraeducators focus on getting to know their students, sharing experiences, and attending to their social and emotional needs. As members of the communities where the students live, they are able to establish special relationships, ones deeply rooted in the shared experiences, culture, and language. Paraeducators help to motivate students and provide them access to education. Though they have valuable knowledge to contribute to the classroom, their marginalized positions prevent true collaboration with teachers. Paraeducators face many obstacles to higher education, but with tuition assistance, they are often able to overcome them. The task for the future is to recognize the paraeducators' expertise and utilize it in the classroom.

This network of literature about bilingual paraeducators provides one of the conceptual frameworks in which I base my research. From previous studies, we see that paraeducators occupy a valuable but marginal role in the classrooms, one with many challenges. At the same time, some paraeducators have opportunities to teach and receive support to continue their own education. Studies suggest that the effects of support and mastery experiences impact their self-efficacy beliefs. These findings about bilingual paraeducators was the impetus for my thesis, a study that details the transformative nature of the emerging bilingual assistants' position in an additive bilingual program as they increase their self-efficacy beliefs. These beliefs combined experiences and additional knowledge leads to empowerment.

The second underlying framework for this thesis rests in the ideas of empowerment and self-efficacy. “*Empowerment* is a process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals can take action to improve their life situations” (Gutierrez, 1990, p. 150). As part of empowerment, Freire (1984) explains that to break the “culture of silence,” individuals engage in dialogue to understand their realities and emerge from it with a better understanding of their own worth. Essentially, empowerment is “where the person develops a sense of personal power, an ability to affect others, and an ability to work with others to change social institutions” (Gutierrez, p. 150).

Important to the concept of empowerment is the effects it has on a group: “individual empowerment can contribute to group empowerment and how the increase in a group’s power can enhance the functioning of its individual members” (Gutierrez, 1990, p. 150). Freire describes that when the oppressed “discover within themselves the yearning to be free, they perceive that this yearning can be transformed into reality only when the same yearning is aroused in their comrades” (p. 32). From these definitions of empowerment, it becomes apparent that empowerment is not an isolated and personal experience, rather one’s empowerment simultaneously empowers others.

Another element of empowerment is dialogue. The process of empowerment encourages people to talk about their own perspectives and does not force upon them a certain way of thinking. Freire states, “It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to

dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world” (p. 85). Therefore, to become empowered, individuals must be actively involved in the process as they discuss their experiences and situations with others.

According to Gutierrez (1990), four psychological changes are necessary in the process of empowerment and compelling one to action: increasing self-efficacy (the power to produce and control the events of one’s life), developing group consciousness (“a sense of shared fate [that] allows them to focus their energies on the causes of their problems”), reducing self-blame (individuals “feel less defective or deficient and more capable of changing their situation”) and assuming personal responsibility (individuals realize that their decisions may result in future change) (p. 150). Gutierrez adds that these four changes are simultaneous and may work to strengthen each other.

The second conceptual framework for this thesis includes perceived self-efficacy which is “concerned with judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (Bandura, 1982, p. 122). Bandura explains that people judge whether to do an activity or not based partly on the belief that they can do it. “When beset with difficulties people who entertain serious doubts about their capabilities slacken their efforts or give up altogether, whereas those who have a strong sense of efficacy exert greater effort to master the challenges” (p. 123). Bandura explains that self-efficacy is not just the judgements about one’s capabilities, but also a person’s thoughts, actions, and behaviors.

Bandura (1982) explains that beliefs about one's self-efficacy are based on four sources of information: (1) "*Enactive attainments* provide the most influential source of efficacy information because it can be based on authentic mastery experiences. Successes heighten perceived self-efficacy; repeated failures lower it." (2) *Vicarious experiences*. "Seeing similar others perform successfully can raise efficacy expectations in observers who then judge that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities." (3) "*Verbal persuasion* is widely used to get people to believe they possess capabilities that will enable them to achieve what they seek." And (4) *Physiological state*. "They read their visceral arousal in stressful and taxing situations as an ominous sign of vulnerability to dysfunction. Because high arousal usually debilitates performance, people are more inclined to expect success when they are not beset by aversive arousal than if they are tense and viscerally agitated" (pp. 126-127). Together these four sources simultaneously contribute to a person's belief of self-efficacy.

Freire's notions about empowerment seem to echo Bandura's ideas about self-efficacy. Freire (1984) states that a person committed to human liberation, "enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he can better transform it. He is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled" (p. 24). Freire says that through "knowing," an individual is in a better position to effect change. In essence, the perceived self-efficacy is high because the individual has gained more knowledge.

To summarize, empowerment is characterized by the belief that one can change their life situations while taking steps to transform social institutions. The

process requires dialogue, usually strengthens with membership in a group, and self-efficacy, the belief that one can carry out a course of action. Self-efficacy beliefs come from various sources but work together simultaneously. In brief, an individual is empowered and has increased self-efficacy when other people in the same group are involved in the similar process. Together these ideas of empowerment and self-efficacy provide the second conceptual framework for this thesis.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This thesis documents the results of a year-long study investigating the professional roles, personal experiences, intersection of these two domains, changing beliefs and practices, and perceived efficacy of the four emerging bilingual assistants (EBAs) involved in the Emerging Bilingual Program. Throughout the study, I sought to view the EBAs' experiences through their own eyes, the "emic" perspective of themselves, their relationships, and positions. Ethnography seemed to be the natural fit, because I was looking to gain a holistic and deep understanding of their lives.

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) explain the basic principle of ethnography:

Ethnographic field research involves the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives. Carrying out such research involves two distinct activities. First, the ethnographer enters into a social setting and gets to know the people involved in it; usually the setting is not previously known in an intimate way. The ethnographer participates in the daily routines of this setting, develops ongoing relations with the people in it, and observes all the while what is going on. . . . Second, the ethnographer writes down in regular, systematic ways what she observes and learns while participating in the daily rounds of life of others. Thus the researcher creates an accumulating written record of these observations and experiences (p. 1).

In this ethnographic study, I explore the lives of the EBAs by participating and observing their daily routines and developing relationships with them. From the

written record of these interactions, I examined how the EBAs define their roles and involvement in the Emerging Bilingual Program.

As a researcher and colleague, I had the opportunity to participate in the lives of the EBAs, both in and outside the school domain. Van Maanen (1988) emphasizes the importance of participant observation; “Fieldwork asks the researcher, as far as possible, to share firsthand the environment, problems, background, language, rituals, and social relations of a more or less bounded and specified group of people” (p. 3). I shared many diverse experiences with the EBAs in the classrooms, at meetings, or at other functions outside of school. Through ongoing and multifaceted contact with the EBAs, I was able to take note of their daily routines and challenges, providing a rich and extensive record of their lives. Van Maanen further explains, “To write an ethnography requires at minimum some understanding of the language, concepts, categories, practices, rules, beliefs, and so forth, used by members of the written-about group” (p. 13). These interactions with the EBAs allowed a deep understanding of their lives and beliefs.

In comparison to research methods in which the objectives and questions are rigidly designated before entering the field, ethnography was especially useful in gaining the perspectives of the EBAs, because the data collection process depended on them sharing their experiences and perspectives. The questions and purpose of the study evolved as new information was gathered. As such, I believe this approach reveals insight that may not be available with other types of research, and in the end,

this ethnography presents the EBAs' views about topics that are important to them, rather than on topics important only to a researcher.

### Emerging Bilingual Program

The EBAs helped to plan and implement the Emerging Bilingual (EB) program, a component of an Early Reading First grant. The program focused on two major goals: 1) providing home language support to EB students to help them maintain their language, and 2) introducing Spanish to monolingual English-speakers. As part of this program, the EBAs also provided additional oral language support to all students throughout the day.

### *Classrooms*

The four EBAs, who are the focus of this study, worked in 14 preschool classrooms involved in the Early Reading First grant; eight in public-school settings, four in one community-based learning centers, and two in another. Over the course of the year, the EBAs had to adjust to several new schedules as one center closed and the grant decided to partner with another center. Also during the year, the grant decided to remove support from one classroom and add it to another. The 14 preschool classrooms involved in the grant were not necessarily all served at the same time.

Average class size of the 14 classrooms involved in the grant was from 12 to 15 students. Eleven classrooms had from two to seven emerging bilingual students,



and the EBAs provided home language support and facilitated whole group activities in Spanish. Three classrooms had no Spanish-speaking students, and in these classrooms, the assistants introduced some words in Spanish and focused on oral-language development in both English and Spanish.

### *Emerging Bilingual Assistants (EBAs)*

The EBAs were bilingual with varying degrees of language proficiency; Gaby and Rosa were native-speakers of Spanish, Ana was raised in a bilingual environment, and Penny was a native-speaker of English. They worked from 12 to 35 hours a week in the preschools and Penny, Rosa, and Gaby were paid \$12.00 per hour without benefits. Ana was paid \$14.00 an hour because she had a degree, but like the others, did not receive benefits. Table 1 gives background information about the EBAs. (Language preference reflects the language the EBAs used most often with each other and with me, but does not necessarily reflect their language dominance).

Table 1. Background Information for Emerging Bilingual Assistants

Name <sup>4</sup>	Age	Background	Language Preference	Number of Work Hours	Number of Classrooms
Penny	23	Non-Hispanic White	English	35	4
Gaby	27	Mexican	Spanish	35	4
Ana	33	Mexican American	English	12	1
Rosa	36	Mexican	English/Spanish	17.5	1

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<sup>4</sup> I asked the EBAs if they wished to be identified in this study, and they said that they wanted me to use their first names. Penny explained, "I made a difference, not Lindsay [a pseudonym I used for her in a pilot study] That's good for people to see that it's a real person. Not just a made-up name. And the chances of people knowing me anyways is slim to none. I wouldn't have any problems if you just put my name in it, because that's me. At least I know who you are talking about." All other names (except Rosa's tutor, Jerry) have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Penny, 23, was born and raised in Kansas. She took her two children to a daycare provider when she went to work. She learned Spanish from her Mexican husband and her coworkers at a Mexican restaurant. She had not received any formal education in Spanish, and her written Spanish had errors in spelling, tense, and agreement. With the free tuition offered by the grant, Penny enrolled in a psychology course, which she later dropped.

Gaby, 27, was born and raised in Zacatecas, Mexico. She graduated from high school and attended college in Mexico before coming to the United States. For the past seven years, she worked at a fast-food restaurant where she continued to work on weekends. She learned English in classes in Mexico, in ESL classes in the United States, and from friends and coworkers in the U.S. Though she wanted to study at the university, the intensive English class she wanted was only offered when she was working. Gaby planned to enroll when the course became available.

Ana, 33, was born in the United States and had lived in California before coming to Kansas. Ana's mother took care of her three children while she worked. She grew up learning Spanish at home but had decided not to teach Spanish to her own children. During meetings, she usually spoke English and questioned the meaning of several words in Spanish. Ana had a B.A. in liberal studies and took advantage of the tuition assistance offered by the grant to enroll in several university classes, which she eventually had to drop due to the time commitment.

Rosa, 36, was born in Mexico and moved to the United States when she was 24. She ran away from home when she was 14 and was homeless for about four years. She attended school until first or second grade and later got her G.E.D. in the United States. She attended a vocational school and had worked as an ESL tutor in an elementary school for a semester. She had never attended college but enrolled and completed several classes (American history, public speaking, psychology, sociology, martial arts, and writing composition) during the grant.

These four EBAs were selected for the study because they are all bilingual and work with the Early Reading First grant in similar classrooms. Prior to their positions with the grant, Ana worked as a substitute teacher and Rosa as a paraeducator in the district. Besides being second language learners themselves, none of the EBAs had been exposed to concepts of second language acquisition or bilingual education. The four EBAs are representative of bilingual paraeducators and represent various backgrounds along the spectrum, from a non-Hispanic white who has learned Spanish, to a Mexican American, to a Mexican who has been educated in the United States to a Mexican educated in Mexico. They also present diversity in their knowledge of Mexican traditions, culture, and language. While this study is limited to the perspectives of four bilingual women in a defined context, the variety in their backgrounds and experiences suggest the findings to more generalizable.

### *The Researcher*

I am a graduate research assistant with the Early Reading First grant and a Master's student in the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Program at the University of Kansas. I have worked as an ESL paraeducator with elementary and high school students, have taught English to professionals and university students in Mexico and to adult immigrants in the United States, and have taught Spanish at a community college. My knowledge of Spanish and Latin American traditions comes from studies in academic settings, conversations with friends and coworkers, and experiences gained while living in Mexico and Venezuela for about two years. My ability to speak Spanish allowed me to participate more fully in the lives of the EBAs and their families, as they were able to express themselves in the language they preferred or that seemed more comfortable at the time. Also, as a Spanish language learner, I asked questions about words or phrases in Spanish and let the EBAs teach me as I made mistakes. I believe that the EBAs felt more comfortable to ask questions and talk about language, because they saw that I had come down a similar path.

### *Information Collection and Analysis*

Information about the experiences and perspectives of the EBAs was gathered through several sources. I did not just rely on what the EBAs reported to me during interviews and informal conversations, but corroborated it with observations in the classroom and interviews with their friends and family members. Through this

process of triangulation, the collection of data is richer and the analysis stronger.

Using a combination of methods also presented a much more rounded picture of the EBAs' lives and behavior.

In the summer of 2007, I helped interview and hire the four EBAs with Dr. Karen Jorgensen. I planned and facilitated a three-day orientation session (21 hours) and led weekly professional-development meetings for the EBAs from August to May 2008 (total of 49 hours). I also presented in nine monthly half-day professional-development seminars with 14 preschool teachers, 14 paraeducators, and the four EBAs involved in the grant (34 hours) and other training sessions (10 hours). I observed the EBAs in the classroom (55 hours) and had other contact with them during lunch or through phone calls and emails (about 20 hours). The total contact time with the EBAs during their school-related activities was 189 hours. In addition, I spent time outside the school setting with all of the EBAs (approximately 30 hours), when I met their families, participated in family events, and conducted interviews. Data for this ethnography came from fieldnotes from meetings and classroom observations, both formal and informal interviews, minutes from meetings, video recordings of classroom interactions, and the EBAs' biographies written for a family newsletter. I also had the EBAs construct visual narratives using photographs they had taken.

*Participant Observation*

I was involved in and participated in classroom activities throughout the year. Agar (1996) explains that participant observation “suggests that you are directly involved in community life, observing and talking with people as you learn from them their view of reality” (p. 163). Towards those ends, I participated in various aspects of the preschool day including circle time, work stations, and lunch. While I fully participated, I remained sensitive to what the EBAs and emerging bilingual students did and said. (See copy of informed consent in Appendices B and C.)

To explore the EBAs “funds of knowledge,” I participated in activities with the EBAs’ families and friends. I asked each one of them to choose an activity or an event outside of school that they would like to share with me. I understand the ethnographer must become close to her participants, yet, I wanted to ensure that the study was not too intrusive or time-consuming on the EBAs’ part. Rosa invited me to attend a church service and potluck where I met some of her friends. She also wanted me to meet and interview her tutor, Jerry. I attended a church service with Penny and went to a picnic with her parents, sisters, and their families. I accompanied Ana to the church where she and her husband provide childcare while the parents attend ESL classes. In addition, I had several informal and impromptu meetings with Ana and her family at their home and at the park. Gaby invited me to dinner at her house where I met and talked to her parents, brothers, sister, and friends.

After participating in these activities both in and out of the classroom, I shifted my focus to turning my head notes and scribbled notes into fieldnotes.

“Momentarily out of the field, the researcher sits down to the task of turning recollections and jottings into detailed written accounts that will preserve as much as possible what she noticed and now feels is significant” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 39). I “typed up” my observations and had over 250 pages of fieldnotes to code and analyze.

### *Interviews*

Interviews were conducted to find more about the EBAs’ expressed perspectives and explore the “relationship between what people say and what they do” (Agar, 1996, p. 156). Initially, I focused my attention on informal interviews because of the participants’ discomfort with formal settings and video recordings, environmental conditions that prevented high-quality recordings, and the spontaneity of the conversations. I also found that my initial attempts with formal, recorded interviews changed the assistants’ language register; they seemed to want to give the “right” answer instead of voicing their opinions. Informal interviews reflected naturally occurring conversations and an authentic representation of the EBAs’ beliefs. In informal interviews “everything is negotiable,” but through gestures, reflections, or probes, the researcher gathers information by asking the participant to elaborate (Agar, 1996, p. 140). I found that these informal interviews encouraged the EBAs to reveal their worlds through their own perspectives, and these informal interviews with the participants followed their language preferences. For example, conversations between Gaby and I were entirely in Spanish, while the other EBAs

spoke mostly English. These informal interviews were not confined to a particular place or time, but occurred on the phone, at lunch, and in the hallways at school. During these informal interviews, I often took notes, asked the EBAs to repeat themselves, and asked for clarification by using a variety of questioning strategies (Agar). Occasionally during our weekly meetings, I asked the EBAs if I could record our conversation. They agreed, and over time they did not show changes in their speech or comfort level as they had earlier in the year.

Later I shifted my attention to formal interviews with the EBAs with the goal of checking what I had learned through observations and informal interviews and to gather more information about the lives of the EBAs using a systematic approach. In May, I conducted an interview with each of the EBAs and focused the questions to the unique situations in their personal and professional lives (see more information in visual and narrative emphases section).

Initially, I did not plan to interview the families of the EBAs, but the data suggested interactions among families and friends influenced what they EBAs brought to the classrooms and what they believed about bilingual education. With this in mind, I conducted formal interviews the families and friends of the EBAs. The EBAs selected people that they would like me to interview, and I asked them a few questions about the EBAs' position with the grant and any changes they had observed in their behavior, language, or future plans (See Appendix D for a list of these interview questions). The EBAs were present during these interviews and participated by telling stories or explaining further. The interviews lasted from 5



minutes to 2 hours, and (average time was 40 minutes). The large range of time of the interviews is due to the family's available time and comfort level with the interviews. I recorded and transcribed these interviews for coding and analysis.

### *Visual and Narrative Emphasis*

In order to involve the EBAs in determining the themes and topics for discussion during their formal and individual interviews, I followed the method described by Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006) in using “both photographs and narratives to explore the world of paraeducators with language minority students” (p. 67). In their study, they distributed cameras to paraeducators and had them take pictures that described their lives as paraeducators. Then, the paraeducators used the pictures as a “memory aid” which helped them “construct narratives of their professional worlds” (p. 67). Ernst-Slavit and Wenger found that this method “demonstrates the potential of visual anthropology” (p. 78) and helps to document the lives of the paraeducators.

In the present study, each EBA was given a disposable camera and asked to take pictures of “what was important to them” or “something that helped describe who they are.” Initially, EBAs said they could complete the project within two weeks but then discovered they needed more time. The collection phase of the project took almost a month and then the film was developed. In individual interviews, I asked the EBAs to describe each picture, label it if they could, and explain why they took it. These sessions ended with an additional open-ended interview. (See Appendix D for

instructions and questions used during these interviews). These interviews with the EBAs lasted from 45 minutes to two and half-hours (the average time was 90 minutes). All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Rather than imposing my own topics on the interview, themes of particular interest to the EBAs were allowed to emerge as they shared their pictures. At the same time, I solicited information or clarification and asked additional questions.

### *Video Recording*

The data collection process also included video recording. Each EBA was asked to record about 15 minutes weekly of the whole class instructional time in Spanish and the emerging bilinguals “pull-out” group time. Even with these guidelines, the amount of data collected by the EBAs varied greatly. For example, after five months of recording, Penny’s camera was stolen and the data deleted. On the other hand, Rosa recorded over 15 hours of activities in the preschool classroom. I viewed about five hours of the videos and took note of rich points, or when something unexpected happens and the “ethnographer learns that his or her assumptions about how the world works, usually implicit and out of awareness, are inadequate to understand something that had happened” (Agar, 1996, p. 32). It is the job of the ethnographer to make sense of that rich point in light of her other observations. I used these video recordings to compare and contrast my observations in the classroom and to corroborate what the EBAs said during their interviews. In

addition, during the individual interviews I asked the EBAs questions based on the video recordings.

### *Analysis*

I used the grounded approach to generate theory from the data about the EBAs (Glaser, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In grounded theory the researcher does not force categories and concepts on the data, rather allows theory to emerge through the process of coding and categorizing. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explain, “Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (p. 45). Likewise, I began the process of coding and analyzing while I was still collecting data. I used the information I had already gathered to guide me in further collection and analysis of data.

After reviewing more than 250 pages of fieldnotes, transcribed interviews, and other materials, I began the process of coding. I used open coding at the beginning to “entertain all analytic possibilities” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 151). As I read the fieldnotes for the second, third, and fourth times, I began to “sift through and categorize small segments of the fieldnote record by writing words and phrases that identify and name specific analytic dimensions and categories” (p. 150). I marked these codes both in the margins of my fieldnotes and also in a notebook. As I continued coding, certain themes seemed to emerge and I began to categorize my

codes according to these themes, moving to *selective* coding or focused coding of rich points (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 151 – 155; Glaser, 1992). I looked for patterns in the data and put them in conceptual categories. Along the way, I discussed the coding with my colleague, Dr. Karen Jorgensen, and eventually shared it with the participants to ensure that the themes were reflective of the data. I also showed earlier drafts of this paper with the EBAs to get their feedback and corrections.

Glaser's (1992) discussion of the use of literature is also relevant to the current study. He recommends reading a variety of texts including unrelated literature in the beginning of a research project. As the theory begins to emerge from the data, Glaser suggests the researcher begin to review the literature in the area and relate it to his or her own work. In this way, the researcher is not swayed to verify or refute the findings of others, but to generate theory from the data. I followed Glaser's recommendations with regards to the literature and began to focus on relevant literature once I analyzed part of my own data and uncovered some of the core variables. Then I continued the process of coding, analysis, and reading.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) also point out that generation of theory occurs in non-traditional areas where research about the topic has not been carried out. In this respect, my study is generating theory because few, if any, studies have focused on both the professional and personal lives of the paraeducators. In this sense, I am not out to verify the findings of others, but to contribute new understandings to this area of education.

## CHAPTER FOUR: SCHOOL

My first research focus in this thesis was to define and explore the professional roles of the EBAs including their challenges and support. From the process of coding and analysis, I realized that many of the emerging themes regarding this research question aligned with those found in previous literature. I have organized them under similar subheadings and categories for easy comparison. This, however, does not imply that I made the research “fit” into these established categories; as the addition of new categories demonstrates. In this chapter I will describe the EBAs’ jobs including facilitating instruction in whole-class and EB pull-out sessions, and I will detail the challenges they faced in the classrooms. Other themes in this chapter include relate to their other duties in the classroom, collaboration with teachers, support from EB team, special relationships, “making a difference,” and barriers to education. In this chapter I hope to supply a multi-faceted and detailed account of their days in the preschool classrooms.

### EBA Job Description

The role of the EBAs were largely negotiated and defined in the classroom. As program coordinators, Dr. Jorgensen and I left the role definition for the EBAs open and flexible so that they and the teachers could work together and make plans according to their particular skills, strengths, classrooms, and their students’ needs. Furthermore, the EBAs’ job description had to be flexible enough to allow for the varying amounts of time that the EBAs spent in each classroom. My colleague and I

arranged a schedule for the EBAs to be in the classrooms depending on the number of EB students enrolled. For example, Rosa spent 17.5 hours each week in the same classroom because there were seven EB students there, and Gaby spent her 35 hours per week in three different classrooms with few or no EBs. Consequently, the program as it was operationalized in each classroom varied in part according to the EBAs' schedules and the amount of time they spent in each classroom.

In classrooms with no Spanish-speaking students, EBAs were expected to teach some Spanish and provide additional oral language support (improving their ability to talk or communicate more effectively), and in classrooms with Spanish-speakers, the EBAs were to provide home language instruction. They had guidelines for the amount of time each week needed for Spanish instruction (from 20 to 30 minutes per week for each component of the program) and ideas about how to include it in the schedule. Other than these few guidelines, the teachers and EBAs were encouraged to work together to define the EBAs' roles, develop a schedule including Spanish instruction, and plan and implement these lessons.

The flexible job description produced variation in what the EBAs were permitted and encouraged to do in the classroom. While some EBAs provided mainly instructional support, others were expected only to help out with daily classroom duties. For example, Lara, a classroom teacher who had two EBs in her class, divided her students into literacy groups and allowed Gaby to teach the Spanish-speaking students and several advanced monolingual English speakers in Spanish. This same teacher encouraged Gaby to teach some Spanish during calendar time and as a result,

all of her students knew greetings, days of the week, weather-related vocabulary, and colors in Spanish. In contrast, Adriana, a teacher with four EBs in her class, did not encourage Penny to work with the kids and told the EBAs there was no time in the schedule for Spanish instruction; as a result, in March her students did not know the basic colors in Spanish.

The position as an EBA, then, involved a meshing of the life experiences and background of the classroom teacher with the goals of the program. The EB program looked different in each classroom because of the differences in the number of EB students, number of hours that the EBAs spent in each classroom, classroom needs, and teachers' perception of the program. As Rosa noted in addressing the problems related to the uniqueness of the program, "I feel like we are an experiment. We cannot follow exactly the book or one schedule." This remark is indicative of both the flexibility of the program and the frustration of the EBAs in implementing a program that had no rigid requirements. Although the program guidelines were designed to assist both the EBAs and the teachers establish an individualized program in each classroom, it also created a situation in which the EBAs questioned their efficacy in the classroom. Because of the flexible nature of the program, many times the program as it was operationalized in the classroom varied greatly from the intended program. For one, the roles of the EBAs, like those of their bilingual educator counterparts, are defined within a unique classroom context and thus vary from classroom to classroom (Weiss, 1994). Furthermore, the EBAs' reflections on their diverse roles in the classroom are similar to the findings of Ernst-Slavit and

Wenger (2006) in which bilingual paraeducators sometimes feel they are on their own and must negotiate their roles in the classroom.

### *Instruction*

The EBAs were involved in two main types of instruction in the classroom. They provided additional oral language support to all students throughout the day and presented Spanish lessons to all the students in a whole group in the classroom, giving the students the opportunity to learn basic Spanish vocabulary. The EBAs also offered instruction to the EBs in a pull-out session that usually took place outside of the classroom, for example in the library or pod. I describe the four EBAs in action in the classroom to demonstrate the variation in instruction in both the whole-class lessons and the EB pull-out lessons.

#### *Whole-Class Instruction*

*Lesson with Penny.* It's April and Penny, four EB students, and eight monolingual English speakers are sitting in a circle on the floor. Penny holds several sheets of construction paper in different colors with the names of the colors in Spanish scrawled on each sheet. She asks them, "*¿Qué color es?*" and the students yell out, "*¡Rojo!*" The students know the colors without prompting. Then Penny tells the students that if they have "*rojo*," they should raise their hand and they'll count how many friends are wearing red that day. Adriana, the classroom teacher, suggests that Penny tell them to stand up if they have on *rojo*. The students stand, and Penny



says, “¿Cuántos amigos tienen rojo?” The students count with her, “Uno, dos, tres, cuatro.” Penny says, “Cuatro amigos tienen rojo.” They continue the activity and the students yell, “I have *verde*!” or “Hey! You have *negro*, Jackie!” Penny introduces a new song about the numbers in Spanish. The kids dance along, just listening. Then Penny advances the CD to a song they had been singing for a week. The kids sing, “*Bella color. Rojo aquí. . . En inglés, rojo es red*” and point to red on their clothing or in the room. The lesson lasted about 15 minutes and the expressed their interest by actively participating.

This vignette reveals several interesting features about the whole group Spanish time with Penny. First, she had no time to work with the students in the classroom until March. When she was finally able to present the lessons in Spanish, the kids were engaged and learning. They quickly learned their colors and used them in sentences without hesitation. Second, the vignette reveals that although Penny is not a certified teacher, she knew how to engage the students and teach them. In other words, although she was not a “teacher” in the technical sense, she was, indeed, effectively teaching. Third, the incident reveals that the classroom teacher, Adriana, did not participate in this Spanish lesson. She was walking around the room preparing materials for the day, and her participation was limited to providing a suggestion to Penny. According to the program goals, ideally the teacher would participate in the lesson so that she could learn and repeat the lessons when the EBA was not there. By not being involved in the activity, the teacher was possibly sending the message that the Spanish lesson was not important. This is particularly telling

given that the same teacher was observed to participate when other grant partners (such as the music therapist) came into the room to present a lesson, but not when it was Spanish time. Fourth, the incident reveals that Penny was willing to accept the teacher's suggestion. Penny later commented that the teacher's suggestion was helpful and made the lesson go a lot smoother. She appreciated that the teacher was willing to give her feedback. Penny explained later, "I needed a lot of help, because I've never done this before. I mean, I'm only twenty-four years old and I didn't go to college and this is new to me." Penny appreciated any feedback or collaboration with the classroom teachers, because she felt that she could learn from them.

*Lesson with Ana.* Ana had puppet and she walked up to the front of the classroom with nine monolingual speakers and five EB students. The puppet said, "*Mi nombre es Pedro y sé hablar dos lenguajes.* (My name is Pedro and I know how to speak two languages.)" Pedro told the students in English and Spanish) that they were going to learn about *los animales* on the farm. The classroom teacher, Kate, put a horse puppet on her hand, asked Ana how to say "horse" in Spanish, and then repeated Ana's prompt that she was a *caballo*. The students shifted their attention to Kate as she lifted the *caballo*'s front feet off the ground and made it neigh. Ana asked the students to repeat the word *caballo*. Then the paraeducator, Sylvia, slipped a cat puppet on her hand and said, "*Yo soy el gato* (I am the cat.)" She made the sound of a cat. Ana presented more words in Spanish: *oveja*, *cerdo*, *búfalo*. She reviewed the animal names with the students and the students repeated them. Later in

the day during center time, Ana sat with an EB student and a monolingual English speaker. They had the puppets spread out before them, and with some help from Ana, the students used the words that Ana presented that morning.

In this short incident, we see both the teacher and paraeducator involved in the lesson along with the EBA. They participated, and though neither one are Spanish-speakers, they attempted to use Spanish. As they made mistakes, they taught the students how to be second language learners. Equally important, Ana had the opportunity to present the lesson and then reinforce the vocabulary later during center time. The lesson about farm animals was also tied into the curriculum and the lessons that Kate was teaching about the farm, a further indication of the collaboration between the EBA and the classroom teacher.

*Lesson with Rosa.* Rosa and Alison (a Non-Hispanic White paraeducator) were sitting on the floor with the seven EB students and seven monolingual English speakers around them in a circle. Rosa asked the students, “¿De qué color es el león? (What color is the lion?)” The classroom teacher who was standing back and filming the lesson responded, “Es león...” She heard Rosa say the answer and then corrected her response, “Oh, el león es amarillo.” Rosa and Alison continued with the activity in both English and Spanish. Alison helped the students make complete sentences in both Spanish and English, and when she noticed that students were not paying attention she said, “Let’s say it together.”

In this vignette, the paraeducator and the EBA were working together to present a small lesson in English and Spanish. The paraeducator knew very little Spanish, but was able to work with Rosa and help teach the language. The classroom teacher participated and was willing to make mistakes in the second language; she was learning Spanish with and from the students. She also helped Rosa fulfill her video recording duties. In this incident, we also see that Rosa was still learning how to present a lesson and was not yet comfortable with classroom management, yet the paraeducator was able to model these things as they worked together.

*Lesson with Gaby.* Two EB students, 12 monolingual students, and two paraeducators were sitting around two small tables with bingo cards. Gaby was at the front of the room and instructed students to repeat the words that she was going to say in Spanish. A boy yelled out, “No!” Gaby smiled and said, “*Sí*.” With a playful tone, she changed the potential power struggle into a game, and more students responded with, “No!” Gaby said, “*Sí*” again, pulled out the first card, and said “*pollo*.” The students repeated the word, a monolingual English speaker said he had a chicken on his card, and he put a marker on it. Gaby then said, “*Pollo* is ‘chicken’.” A paraeducator leaned toward a student and asked, “Where is your *pollo*?”

In this lesson, Gaby revealed an informal instructional style. When a student challenged the rules, Gaby joked with him instead of scolding him. Also, during the lesson, students demonstrated some knowledge of Spanish; they were able to mark their cards before Gaby had told them the word in English. While several

paraeducators were involved in the lesson and tried to reinforce the vocabulary, the classroom teacher did not participate and was not visible in the video. This incident shows that Gaby is given the opportunity to gain mastery experiences by planning and facilitating an activity in the classroom; yet, it also reveals that Gaby and the classroom teacher do not work together to present these lessons.

From these four whole group lessons presented by the EBAs, it is evident that the implementation and design of the program functioned differently in each classroom. The EBAs reported a wide variation in the amount of time that they were permitted for the whole group Spanish lessons, ranging from 15 to 40 minutes a week. In addition, through these vignettes, we see that the lessons varied depending on the EBAs' comfort and skill level in teaching and managing the classroom. The presentation, structure, content, materials, and activities differed in each classroom and with each EBA. Some teachers and paraeducators participated, others offered suggestions, and others were not involved at all.

These differences in the classroom relate to the EBAs' sense of self-efficacy. The EBAs who were allowed time to present lessons in Spanish were the ones who reported sooner and with more frequency that their jobs were making a difference in the lives of the children. Bandura (1982) describes this source of self-efficacy as "enactive attainments" in which a person believes she can complete a course of action because she has previously experienced and mastered it. This concept of self-efficacy is illustrated among the EBAs in that those who regularly presented lessons in Spanish felt they doing more to educate the children. Furthermore, the students who

had been exposed to Spanish on a fairly consistent basis showed a greater understanding of Spanish, revealing that the EBAs' true efficacy seemingly relate to the whether they had this time to present lessons.

We also see that when the classroom teachers or paraeducators were involved, the lessons were more complex and the EBAs used Spanish in more natural ways (asking questions and forming sentences) rather than presenting and reviewing isolated words. This suggests that collaboration between the teachers and EBAs, even though all the teachers were monolingual English speakers, was important in creating an environment for Spanish to be used in a natural way.

#### *EB Pull-out Instruction*

The second main type of instruction that the EBAs offered was during EB pull-out time. The EBAs presented lessons entirely in Spanish to small groups of EB students outside or in another part of the classroom. The EBAs introduced activities, read books, helped the students with letter recognition, and worked on vocabulary and writing. These pull-out sessions also varied in how they were implemented across the 11 classrooms. In some classrooms, the teachers did not want the students to be out of the classroom and the EBAs had to incorporate impromptu Spanish lessons during center time. In other classrooms, the EBAs led literacy groups in Spanish for 30 minutes a day with the EBs.

A lesson with Rosa is presented as an example of the EB pull-out time. Although the other EBAs' lessons and time with students varied from hers, the

interactions observed in this session were typical of the pull-out sessions experienced by the other EBAs. Rosa met with two EBs in the pod outside of the classroom. Rosa tried to control the noise level, because teachers in rooms surrounding the pod had complained before. After doing a short counting activity, she gave them their journals. Miguel said that he was going to make a \**calabeza*<sup>4</sup>. He had the orange marker and drew a circle at the top of the page. Rosa said, “*Estás dibujando una calabaza*. (You are drawing a pumpkin).” Instead of pointing out that the student’s version of the word was wrong, Rosa repeated what he said using the correct pronunciation. The other student, Carlos, was drawing a picture of his family and said, “*Mi mama es panzona*” (My mom is a little fat). They looked at the picture, and Carlos pointed and said, “*panzoncita*.” They all laughed. A kindergarten class walked through the pod on their way to recess, and the students’ attention shifted to them.

As seen in this lesson with Rosa, the atmosphere during EB pull-out time was informal and relaxed. The students talked and laughed, and Rosa gently and subtly corrected the students. Rosa and the students spoke in Spanish, and as noted in other observations and recorded in fieldnotes, when the students inserted words in English, Rosa asked if they knew the word in Spanish or said it herself in Spanish. Even when Rosa stepped away from the table to answer a teacher’s question, the students continued speaking in Spanish to each other. The classroom environment was not ideal because of the distractions from other students walking through the pod,

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<sup>4</sup> The “\*” here indicates a word that has been mispronounced.

interruptions from other teachers, or noise from the classrooms (as noted in fieldnotes). Although the conditions were less than perfect, these sessions helped to reinforce the students' Spanish and gave them an opportunity to practice. At the same time, the session helped convey to the students that their home language was valued enough that they could use it in school, even if they sometimes used it apart from their English-speaking peers.

In pull-out instructional sessions, the EBAs had a chance to interact with students in small groups. The time was not as structured as in the classroom, and students were free to talk about personal things, make jokes, tell stories, or even interrupt to ask questions. The EBAs allowed students to show their emotions and talk about personal things or asked them questions about things that had happened at home or recess. For example, one of Rosa's students fell down and hurt her knee, but she did not want to tell the teacher. During the EB pull-out time, Rosa asked her about her knee and then told her that she should not be afraid to share with the teacher.

During these lessons, the EBAs also talked to the students about their shared experiences. For example, in one of Gaby's pull-out sessions, a student related that her mother made her eat cold tortillas. Gaby, responded, "*Ay, sí es cierto. Es que cuando están frias ya no saben buenas.* (Oh, that's true. When they are cold, they don't taste good anymore.)" It is notable that although the conversation was not deeply personal in nature, the student could not have shared the story with her teacher



not only because of the language barrier, but also because of a lack of knowledge on the teacher's part about tortillas.

The EBAs also shared stories about themselves with EBs during pull-out time. In one session, Penny told her students in Spanish that she was sleeping and she woke up to the sound of “*una* firetruck” outside. The students asked her what happened and then they shared a few stories of their own while Penny listened and asked questions. While in the classroom teachers often struggled to provide individual attention to the students, pull-out time provided a rich opportunity for students to talk one-on-one with an adult about things that mattered most to them.

Invariably, the EBAs created an informal and light instructional atmosphere during the EB pull-out time. For example, Penny read to the students and each time the cow talked in the story, she lowered her voice and stretched out the vowels. The students giggled and a boy said, “*Es* funny.” Also, while she was reading, two students were drawing pictures in their journals, and they looked up every so often to take a look at the pictures in the book, giggle, or make a comment. Many times the EBAs allowed the students to work at their own pace or provided them with several options. The students worked on different activities (drawing pictures, playing with matching cards, or telling stories) and the EBA divided her attention among them.

In these sessions, the EBAs showed *cariño*, or affection to the students. Gaby referred to her students “*mija*” (my child) and Rosa would pat them on the shoulder or lightly put her hand on the students' hand. The EBAs' instructions for the students during this time were often softened. For example, Penny told one student, “*Si no*

*quieres dibujar ahora, los marcadores van en la caja, okay?* (If you don't want to draw now, the markers go in the box, okay?)” Such *cariño* helped the EBAs create a comforting and trusting instructional time that differed substantively from the businesslike atmosphere of the classroom.

At the same time that the EBAs attempted to create this informal and relaxed atmosphere, however, they also reported being confused at times about what was the “right way.” For example, Rosa said she was afraid of being too easy on the students. During the pull-out sessions, she let the students get a drink if they asked and did not force them to sit perfectly still in their chairs. She noticed that in the classroom, the students were expected to be quiet and still, but she did not want those rules for the EB pull-out time. Sometimes, though, the teacher or paraeducator would walk by the table and tell the students to “sit right.” It is clear that Rosa had different expectations for the students, but was trying to find a balance that both she and the teachers felt comfortable with. This became even more evident later, when in one session a boy touched a strand of Rosa's curly hair and asked, “*¿Por qué tu pelo es café aquí?* (Why is your hair brown here?)” Rosa ignored his question and told him to sit down and finish his drawing. After the lesson, we discussed the importance of answering children's questions even if they might be off topic. Rosa explained that she had been struggling with that, but was trying to copy the teaching style of the classroom teacher. “She is the one who knows.” Like the other EBAs, Rosa was trying to figure out how to teach while also addressing the students' individual needs. She wanted to find the balance of “teaching and still [letting] them be who they are.”

The observations in the classroom reveal several fundamental differences between the whole group and the EB pull-out time. The EBAs showed more instances of *cariño* to the students during the EB time and in general, talked about them with more affection than they did the other students in the class calling them “*mi amor* (my love)” or “*mis niños* (my children).” These times when the EBAs were alone with the EB students helped to strengthen their relationships as the EBAs encouraged the students to talk and ask questions in Spanish. In addition, the EBAs seemed to be more confident during these times than during the whole group instruction due to a number of factors. First, the number of students during the EB pull-out session were fewer than in the whole group session, and the EBAs could manage them more easily. Second, the EBAs were alone with the students during this time and could talk to the students in the way they felt most comfortable. Besides speaking Spanish during these sessions, the EBAs changed the way they interacted with the students by establishing a more conversational and informal style. The findings of this study are consistent with those of researchers Monzó and Rueda in that both EBAs and bilingual paraeducators have the opportunity for small group instruction that is relaxed and informal (Monzó & Rueda 2001a, 2001b, 2003). The EBAs were allowed to follow their own expectations during these times, rather than making their language and classroom management style fit the expectations of the classroom teacher.

In the classroom the EBAs were able to make education accessible to the EB students by speaking their common language. They used their knowledge about the

students' culture and language to make the experiences in the classroom meaningful. These findings are similar to those of Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006) who found that the bilingual paraeducators are largely responsible for the instruction of language minority students, because they are the ones who speak their language.

Both bilingual paraeducators and EBAs help teachers provide instructional assistance, bilingual paraeducators by implementing plans designed by classroom teachers and EBAs by teaching lessons they themselves create for whole group instruction and EB pull-out times. The roles of EBAs depart somewhat from their bilingual paraeducator counterparts in the extent of their autonomy in the classroom. For example, the EBAs in this study were given the freedom to help design, develop, and implement an additive bilingual program, taking into consideration the various schools in which they worked and the specific needs in each classroom. Unlike the bilingual paraprofessionals discussed in the current research, the EBAs I worked with did more than simply carry out the plans of the teacher; they had to put their own creativity and knowledge into the lessons. And although the lack of a rigid plan may have caused some confusion and even frustration, the EBAs knew that they were hired and valued for their unique contributions to the classroom. In light of the literature about self-efficacy, Bandura (1982) explains that successful attempts to complete a task increase self-efficacy beliefs. Similarly, when the EBAs make their lesson plans and implement them successfully in the classroom, they contribute to their self-efficacy beliefs.

### *Challenges to Instruction*

Throughout the year, the EBAs experienced many challenges in their instructional roles in the classrooms that they later expressed to me in meetings, interviews, phone calls, and in informal meetings in the hallways or during lunch. These challenges can be grouped into the categories of teacher resistance, scheduling conflicts, inadequate classroom conditions, and language practices. Combined, these challenges serve to illustrate the EBAs' persistence and belief in a program that was difficult to implement.

*Teacher Resistance.* Some of the resistance that EBAs experienced was due to a lack of understanding that teachers had of the program and how to implement it in the classroom. Even though one of the articulated goals of the program is to teach Spanish to monolingual English speakers, one teacher told Rosa that she had no Spanish-speaking students in her classroom, would not need Rosa's help, and that she could go home. Other teachers questioned the EBAs about the importance of maintaining the Spanish-speaking students' home language and suggested they should spend more time teaching the students English. Some teachers understood the goals of the program but resisted it because of negative personal experiences. For example, Adriana, a Mexican-American teacher, had family members who were punished for speaking Spanish. As a result, she believed there was a negative stigma associated with speaking Spanish, and she refused to let Penny present lessons in class or to work individually with EB students. Normally, she disguised her

resistance to the program by saying there were conflicts with the schedule or that Penny's absences due to family challenges prevented them from incorporating Spanish. Yet, other EBAs noticed this teacher's negative attitude during the professional-development seminar. Gaby said that Adriana was committing "*doble error, hasta triple error* (a double error, even a triple error)," because she didn't learn Spanish herself, didn't teach it to her own children, and now was preventing her students from learning it too.

The EBAs' experience of teacher resistance to the program is consistent with Lee and Oxelson's findings (2006) in that "teachers did not see a role for themselves and schools in the heritage maintenance process of their students" (p. 468). In addition, the EBAs felt they were in inferior positions with less control and decision-making opportunities than other teachers. Their feelings are representative of what Nieto (2002) describes: "They [bilingual teachers] may be seen as less intelligent, less academically prepared, and less able than non-bilingual teachers—this in spite of the fact that they are usually fluent in two languages and have a wide range of pedagogical approaches for teaching a diverse student body" (p. 92). Like bilingual paraeducators, the EBAs felt they did not work as partners with the teachers in some classrooms (Rueda & Monzó, 2002). Their perceived inferior positions were consistent with the work of Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006), who found that bilingual paraeducators were marginalized in their positions in the classroom.

*Scheduling.* The EBAs struggled to find time to introduce Spanish to the whole class and to reinforce Spanish with the EBs. Several EBAs reported that they had to fight for this time segment, and some won much sooner than others. For example, Rosa had her times for the EBs set from the beginning of school, but at the end of the year was still fighting for a time to introduce Spanish to the whole group. Penny said that Adriana explained she had little time to plan for class and that adding Spanish would take even more time. Penny said, “If the teacher would give me time, then she would have more time to get other things done.” Penny was only able to get time in April after I mediated a meeting between her and the teacher. Even if the EBAs had a time slot in the schedule, they were often pushed out to make room other activities, such as breakfast, bathroom breaks, counselor visits, curriculum, calendar, lunch, recess, free play, and rest time. Penny and Gaby addressed the scheduling concerns by taking advantage of transition times during the day to focus on language. They read books in Spanish to EB students before rest time or used playtime to focus on oral-language development. They realized that they would rarely have 15- or 20-minute blocks of time to work with the EB students, so they had to improvise and be ready for spontaneous teaching moments.

Rosa said that she often struggled to find time just to interact with the students because the teacher expected them to be quiet as they drew, ate lunch, or washed their hands. “Everything is rules, rules, rules, after rules. When is the time that I was supposed to be interacting with them?” She also said that the day was so structured that the students rarely had the opportunity to talk or be creative. She explained her

view of the teacher's expectations, "You are going to write what I tell you to write, you are going to dance the way I want you to dance, you are going to express yourself the way I am telling you to express yourself." From her comments, we see that Rosa was struggling with the schedule of the classroom and the teacher's behavioral expectations. She found it especially difficult to focus on the goal of oral language development in English or Spanish when the structure and the teacher's expectations prohibited it for such a large portion of the day.

*Inadequate Classroom Conditions.* All of the EBAs reported struggles in finding an adequate place to work with the EB students without distraction. Rosa, for example, met with students in the pod outside their classroom, which teachers and paraeducators used for testing or to provide additional support to small groups of students. She was regularly interrupted as classes walked through the pod on their way to the bathroom, recess, or lunch, or as other teachers would stop and ask the students questions during their lesson. In these cases, the students' focus shifted and Rosa fought to get it back. Other EBAs met in the library when no other classes were using it, but were still met with unexpected visitors and interruptions.

In much the same way that EBAs received the "leftover" spaces in the schools for instruction, they had to carve out spaces in the classroom for their work areas. As an illustration, Rosa set up a temporary desk each morning on the student's sensory table, and then packed up all of her supplies at the end of each day. Further, the EBAs' office area was a converted closet located in one building, and they traveled



across town to get books, curriculum guides, and materials, which were piled on the shelves, behind the door, and on the desk.

The EBAs often worked in available spaces, and not necessarily ideal places. They had a number of interruptions and distractions during EB pull-out times as their lessons took place in the transitory classroom in the school. Nieto (2002) claims that the spaces where bilingual education takes place are indicative of the value the school place on bilingual education, and Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006) found that bilingual paraeducators often worked in “leftover” spaces.

*Language Practices.* During the EB pull-out time, the EBAs were to speak entirely in Spanish with the students. Although all of them were proficient in the language, they sometimes made mistakes or inserted words in English. For example, in one lesson, Penny was talking to the students about the objects *en la escuela* (at the school). She spoke Spanish for the most part but inserted the English words “playground,” “shelves,” and “library”. Penny noted that she had been using English to the students and explained that she was speaking Spanglish, “*inglés y español al mismo tiempo* (English and Spanish at the same time.)” Ana also made a few errors in Spanish as she was talking to the students; for instance, she stumbled over a few words in the book she was reading to the students, and she did not know the word for magnets (*imanes*) and substituted it with the invented word, “magnetos.” Ana explained that the EB team was a valuable language source for her and that she felt comfortable asking for help from the other members. “I ask you guys, ‘How do you

say this word?’ But I don’t want to say that all the time. Because then you will be like, ‘[You’re] incompetent.’ (Laughs.)” Even Rosa, a native Spanish-speaker, sometimes mispronounced the names of the letters in Spanish. In other words, all of the EBAs demonstrated that they were still in the process of learning languages, both their native and second languages. With their team members, they were able to discuss their questions and find solutions to their language doubts.

Though the EBAs did make “mistakes” in these lessons; they were able to provide home language support that is normally not a part of preschool classrooms. As they code-switched during the lessons or inserted words or phrases in English, they were providing the students with a model of a bilingual person and a second language learner. They were also showing the students that they, too, make mistakes. During the whole group lessons, the EBAs made fewer mistakes because many of the words were isolated and more controlled by the lesson.

In summary, the EBAs encountered a number of challenges to providing instruction in the classroom. The teachers’ resistance to the program made implementing the program more difficult, but also made the EBAs feel like outsiders in the classroom. Some EBAs did not have a set time in the schedule, and other EBAs were pushed out. They also worked in the “leftover spaces” at the schools. The EBAs were the “experts” in the Spanish language, yet they inserted English or struggled to find the word in Spanish they wanted. These challenges help to reveal and explain the EBAs’ marginal positions in the classroom. They are neither here nor there, but in the “betwixt and between” (Turner, 1995). Their positions in the

classroom are ambiguous and flexible, and they are neither teachers nor students. They realized that they had little or no authority and they were “just a part of the classroom.”

Being unable to make decisions in the classroom had two contrary effects. On one hand, the EBAs felt frustration because they could not influence the schedule or participate in the class as they wanted. On the other hand, because they were not entirely responsible, they had the option of checking out when it was convenient. To a certain degree, they decided the level of engagement they wanted for themselves in the classroom. For example, I visited Rosa in the classroom and noticed that she spent most of the morning at an impromptu desk making lesson plans. She sat down with the students during circle time, but left at one point to get a drink of water. She presented two 30-minute lessons and then put away all her materials and left for the day. When I asked her about her day and the little time she spent interacting with the students, she said, “Believe me, I’m concerned too, but what do I do? That’s their schedule.” Yet, she continued to be a limited member of the classroom. Essentially, because of their marginal positions, they often lived on the fringes of the classroom, wanting to have greater responsibility but also taking advantage of the fact that they did not have it.

*Clerical Support, Duties, and Responsibilities*

Although the EBAs were in the classrooms to provide additional language support and instruction, they often were “used for other things.” On a more mundane level, they helped hand out breakfast and lunch trays, cleaned tables, and helped distribute, collect, or make materials, and accompanied students to their P.E. and music classes. On a more professional level, the EBAs were responsible for assessing EBs to determine their language proficiency in both English and Spanish. They traveled to other schools in the program to record the students’ responses and document their scores. Their testing duties created an obstacle to the EBAs working with the students, as it took them away from their normal classroom schedules for almost two weeks in the fall and another two weeks in the spring. At the same time, their role in the proficiency assessment gave them information about the students’ strengths and weaknesses in both languages and consequently, helped guide their instruction in the classrooms. Because the EBAs administered a pre- and post-test, they also noted the progress that their students made during the year and rightfully accepted partial credit for teaching the students.

Another important role for the EBAs was providing a link between the students’ home and school. The EBAs were in the classroom each morning to greet parents and interpret if necessary. Throughout the day, the EBAs were called away from working with the children to call a parent if a child was sick or misbehaving. Another opportunity for communication came at the end of the day when parents

picked up their children and the EBAs let them know about the child's day at school or informed them of upcoming events.

Serving to strengthen this link between home and school, the EBAs also interpreted for teachers and parents at enrollment, conferences, and family fun nights. All the EBAs considered communication with the parents an important part of their job. For instance, Ana said that she felt useful when she talked to the parents, and she could tell the parents appreciated it. She said a parent told her, "I'm so thankful that you are here. I really am, because I can talk to somebody and in my own language." Penny commented about the challenges of presenting the teacher's comments in a positive way to the parents. She recalled a teacher who was very "blunt" and told a parent that her son was "not good today at all." When Penny interpreted, she tried to "lighten it up." She said, "You can change it around when you speak another language."

The EBAs not only served as interpreters for their classrooms, but for others in the school as well. Gaby recounted a time she was asked to interpret for a Spanish-speaking kindergarten boy who had been fighting on the playground. He said that he had been playing and the teacher started yelling at him. Gaby tried to explain to him the difference between his idea of play and the teacher's idea of fighting. Even the EBAs' pull-out lessons were interrupted so they could provide assistance to other teachers. Once as Rosa was sitting at a table working with her students, a teacher walked up and asked how to say, "first" in Spanish. The teacher came back several

times to check on her pronunciation, and until finally, Rosa went over to her table and told the student what the teacher wanted to say.

Like bilingual paraeducators, the EBAs reported a number of other duties and responsibilities in the classroom (Rueda & Monzó, 2002; Sandoval-Lucero, 2006; Weiss, 1994). They helped with routine classroom duties, interpreted, and administered language acquisition tests to the students. It is worthwhile to mention the contradictory situation in which some teachers' viewed the EBAs as not necessarily being skilled enough to be of much assistance in the classroom on the one hand, and on the other they were performing fairly important jobs such as assessment and interpreting. In other studies, bilingual paraeducators described an "overwhelming number of roles and duties" (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006, p. 69). In this aspect, the EBAs are similar to their bilingual paraeducators counterparts.

While these other duties and responsibilities sometimes prevented the EBAs from working with the students, they mentioned that they were important and they liked to help out. They also said that interpreting was important because it made the parents feel more comfortable and welcome in the school. The testing process proved to be valuable to them as well, because they saw that students made progress in both English and Spanish. Upon seeing the scores at the end of the year, the EBAs reflected on the year and reported that they contributed to the education of the children by acting as a bridge to communication. They expressed the belief that the students, especially the EB students, would not have made such progress, if the EBAs had not been in the classrooms. By being able to contribute to the preschool

classrooms in a way that no one else could, the EBAs realized their capabilities and their power to change the atmosphere of the classroom, the parents' attitudes towards school, and the educational paths of the children. The EBAs realized that they were personally responsible for the education of the children and for developing the link between home and school. In these vignettes and discussion, we see that the EBAs display two of the four of the psychological changes necessary for empowerment, increased self-efficacy and assuming personal responsibility (Gutierrez, 1990), demonstrating the theme of empowerment within the school domain.

### Collaboration with Teachers

The EBAs reported different perspectives with regards to collaboration with teachers. The EBAs felt that some teachers neither regarded them as partners in the classroom nor valued their opinions or contributions. Penny described it succinctly; "They see us as less than teachers." Some of the EBAs worked in isolation, planning and implementing the lessons alone. Rosa said that she felt like she was not working with the teachers to help bring Spanish into the classroom. She further suggested, "Maybe you guys [the program coordinators] could ask the teachers, 'How are you and the EBA working together to bring Spanish into the classroom?' Because there would be nothing." Rosa shrugged and said, "I don't like to just sit there and babysit. That's how I feel." Penny echoed Rosa's concern. She was available during parent/teacher conferences to help interpret for the parents who spoke Spanish, but Adriana told her that she "wasn't needed" (even though some parents may have

benefited from being able to ask questions in Spanish). Penny said that she also had to learn not to give her ideas in the classroom; “You know, I just do what they want you to do, because it’s their classroom. And we are just a part of it. Now I don’t try to put myself in places where I don’t need to be. I won’t say much. Just do my job.” While the EBAs were not certified teachers, they were responsible for instructing the EB students, and in some instances had educational backgrounds equal to the teachers; yet some felt that their contributions to the classroom didn’t matter.

At the same time, the EBAs reported that they did have the opportunity to collaborate with some teachers in an environment of support and encouragement. Penny compared Adriana to another teacher who during parent/teacher conferences introduced Penny to parents and asked her to take notes. Penny said the teacher, “even let me say what I thought about the kids.” Penny felt that she and the teacher were “partners” and that her input was valued.

The EBAs reported that support from and positive relationships with the classroom teacher helped them learn more and allowed them to complete their jobs more effectively. For example, Gaby described her relationship with Lara, one of the classroom teachers she worked with; “*He aprendido mucho con ella. Ella es la mejor. Con esta maestra puedo aprender mucho.* (I’ve learned a lot with her. She’s the best. With this teacher, I can learn a lot.)” Near the end of the year, Gaby said, “*Ahorita no solo somos compañeras del trabajo sino somos amigas. Somos buenas amigas. Y compartimos muchas cosas en el salón. Ese salón ha sido como mi escuela, y Lara y Jessica [the pareducator] han sido mis maestras también. Entonces*



*yo las aprecio mucho, y les agradezco bien mucho por todo lo que han hecho por mí.*

(Now we are not only coworkers, but also friends. We are good friends. And we have shared many things in this classroom. This classroom has been my school, and Lara and Jessica [the paraeducator] have been my teachers too. So I appreciate them a lot, and I thank them a lot for everything they have done for me.)” Gaby said that in addition to the collaboration and support from Lara, she also received feedback about her lessons. In that particular classroom, then, she learned how to teach and expressed to me an interest in becoming a teacher, an interest and a talent that she never knew she had.

The spirit of collaboration among the teachers and the EBAs varied from classroom to classroom. Some EBAs felt they were just an extra person in the room, while others felt they were members of the instructional staff. These feelings during the year were not static, but changed as some teachers realized the importance of collaboration, and yet others, became more authoritative. From the EBAs’ comments, it becomes apparent that atmosphere of collaboration in the classrooms were related to their beliefs of self-efficacy. Bandura (1982) explains that self-efficacy beliefs increase when individuals have the opportunity for mastery experiences or when there is verbal encouragement. To apply these concepts to the current study, those EBAs who received support from teachers felt like they were able to contribute to the education of the students. In turn, they became more empowered, as they realized their skills were valuable and worth further development.

Even though some of the EBAs faced more resistance, they all had the chance to plan and implement lessons in the classroom and all of them expressed interest in continuing in the education field. These findings are consistent with those of Sandoval-Lucero (2006) who found that paraeducators who had opportunities to deliver instruction increased “the development of their teacher efficacy and their potential for career advancement” (p. 214). Sandoval-Lucero also found that paraeducators who worked in cooperation with teachers developed higher levels of self-efficacy, which lead to higher education and upward mobility within education.

#### Support from EB Team

Besides support from the teachers, all of the EBAs mentioned that the weekly EBA team meeting and monthly professional development seminars were sources of support during the year. As Gaby explained, “*Desde ese día cuando yo llegué por la primera vez con Uds. hasta el día de hoy, yo empecé a apreciar mucho a todo el equipo, como compañeras, como amigas.* (From that day when I first met you guys until now, I started to appreciate the whole team a lot, as colleagues, as friends).” And Rosa felt that, “Even those small meetings with you keep us going. I think that if we didn’t have those meetings, in my personal experience, I [would] probably get too stressed in this thing here, in my situation. I [would] probably cry. I will feel disoriented about what to do in the classroom or how to guide the kids.” Penny also mentioned the weekly meetings; “It helps just talking to our group every Wednesday. I almost gave up lots of times, and just talking to everybody and hearing how they are

going through the same stuff—knowing it’s just not me. It kind of gave me energy again.” The EBAs saw the weekly meetings as a time to share ideas, get support, and re-energize for another week in the classrooms.

These meetings served to empower the EBAs in their positions in the classroom. They received training and access to information that encouraged them to reflect, make choices about their instruction, and then apply those decisions in the classroom. In these meetings, the EBAs discussed the possible effects if this additive bilingual program were to be expanded to include other elementary grades and more students had the chance to become bilingual. In addition, for some EBAs, the meetings were especially positive for helping to overcome the negative stigma of speaking two languages in a largely monolingual country.

While I expected the EBAs to mention the weekly meetings or the EB team, surprisingly all of them also mentioned the significance of the support they received from Dr. Jorgensen and me. Each of them mentioned specific support they received by Dr. Jorgensen and me. Rosa, for example, mentioned that she respected Dr. Jorgensen’s and my philosophy about education. She said, “I feel like you guys [Dr. Jorgensen and myself] are really concerned about the kids; you don’t just have the degrees. You can be a good leader and I can follow you.” Penny mentioned her comfort level in approaching us with problems, “We share the same sensitivities and the same compassion, and it makes you feel more at ease with people when you share them same qualities. So it’s easier to come to you than to say a teacher that is there just to be there, you know?” She also said, “I am very comfortable with you guys,

because you make us feel comfortable. I mean, like if I cry, you cry. How is that not comfortable?” Gaby echoed these sentiments, “[*Aprecio*] a Karen y a ti. *Que son personas tan inteligentes y tan profesionales que nos tengan esa confianza a nosotras me siento tan halagada.* ([I appreciate] Karen and you. That you are so intelligent and so professional and that you have that trust in us flatters me.)” Ana noted the support that she received from the meetings: “There’s times—too many times—where we’ve complained too much to you or to Karen. But you guys just took it or just let us vent, you know? And I just felt supported that way. I felt like, ‘Okay, we can talk to them about whatever struggles we may be going through.’ And I think that you guys knew that we would have struggles. And that’s why we needed to have those weekly meetings—to have that support.” In the EBAs’ comments about support, they emphasized the importance of establishing relationships and feeling comfortable while also being stretched intellectually and professionally.

The EBAs had many challenges in implementing the program in the classrooms. Not only did they face resistance from the teachers, but struggled to find a time to incorporate Spanish. In addition, they were implementing a program that none of us knew how to implement. The support they found during the weekly meetings and from the program coordinators helped them focus on the goals, learn techniques about teaching, and find solutions. During the year, Dr. Jorgensen and I listened to the EBAs as they related situations with teachers and students, the difficulty they had finding time to do their Spanish lessons, and their concerns with the schedule. They also talked about the lessons that went well in their classrooms

and what they had learned about teaching. They said the meetings were also important because they could meet with others who had similar beliefs about bilingual education. They saw these moments as both support and encouragement, and a time for articulating and processing the experiences they had to a non-judgmental and empathetic audience.

From the discussion of these meetings and support systems, the themes of self-efficacy and empowerment subtly emerge. To elucidate them more clearly, I return to Bandura's (1982) discussion of self-efficacy in which both vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion contribute to increased self-efficacy beliefs. As the EBAs meet together weekly, they saw that others on the team were successfully incorporating Spanish into the classroom. In turn, they raised their own expectations and increased their beliefs that they could accomplish a comparable activity. Moreover, during these meetings, the EBAs benefited from verbal persuasion, in which the program coordinators and the EBA team members encouraged and supported one another. As Bandura explains, these two sources of information contribute to an individual's self-efficacy beliefs. To take it even further, both Freire (1984) and Gutierrez (1990) mention that when individuals become empowered, so does the group and vice versa. In the EBAs' case, as each one of them becomes more empowered, they empower the group, and equally important, group empowerment strengthens the performance of each of the individuals in the group.

Though current research discusses the support that bilingual paraeducators may or may not receive from the classroom teachers, the literature leaves a gap in whether they are receiving support from their peers or supervisors. The current study is valuable in that it demonstrates the importance of that support and even details several elements that are essential, including establishing personal relationships, providing stimulating and relevant information, and encouraging the exchange of ideas among colleagues.

### Shared Experiences

Throughout the year, EBAs talked about their shared experiences with students and their families. They felt they could identify with students because they came from the same communities and had similar background or experiences. These experiences helped the EBAs and the students form a unique relationship.

The EBAs and their families worked or lived in the same community as the students' families. Gaby mentioned that her brothers work with the mother of one of the students and that all of her family knows all of the student's family. She has also came across a student at a store, and the student ran over to her and hugged her. The child's aunt was surprised about how the student was acting and asked, "*¿Quién es ella que la niña la quiere tanto?* (Who is she that the girl loves so much?)" Later the aunt said, "*Ha de quererte muchísimo para que la niña actua así contigo.* (For her to act like that with you, she must love you a lot)." For the students, the EBAs are members of the community and are not just relegated to the school boundaries.

The EBAs and students also shared the experience of being second language learners. Rosa, Penny, and Gaby learned their second language as young adults, and even though Ana is the only one of the four who grew up in a bilingual environment, she continued to learn more about Spanish and how to use it in more cognitively demanding situations. The EBAs personally know the frustration, time, and patience involved in learning another language, and this shared experience helped them to understand the students' feelings in the classroom.

Gaby was especially conscious of her language ability in English and how much more she needed to learn. She was nervous to accept the job as an EBA because she was not confident about her abilities in English. She reported that as an English language learner herself, she knows what the EBs must be feeling as they try to communicate in English. She says, "*Esta confianza que yo le ha dado en empezar a hablar su poquito inglés—que ahorita es mucho—me da mucho gusto porque yo sé lo que se siente estar allí cuando no entiendes nada y que te empiezas a sentir con miedo, incómoda todo a la vez. Entonces son cosas que yo he sentido y me gusta que ellas sepan que yo también lo siento. Y no solamente lo estoy diciendo para decírselo.* (This confidence that I have given her [a student] in beginning to speak her little bit of English—that right now is a lot—gives me pleasure because I know what it feels like to be there when you don't understand anything and you begin to feel scared and uncomfortable, all at the same time. So they are things that I have felt, and I like for them to know that I feel it too. I am not just saying it to say it)." In Gaby's situation, she shares not only a common language with the students, but also

the experience of learning another language as an immigrant. Their common experience of being immigrants and having to learn English to survive was something that the classroom teacher did not share and could not understand in the same way.

Penny said that her own personal experiences helped her to understand the students more. She explained, “I think that seeing my son recently [now that his dad is not here], I can see more how it [family challenges] affects children. I think it opened my eyes a lot more and it’s helped me with these kids. I do realize kids’ lives are hard, at all ages.” Penny’s own experiences and those of her family, made her realize what the students at school were going through.

Rosa not only identified with students, but also with some of the students’ families. She said that Spanish-speaking parents came to her and asked for advice. They have seen her advance from a low-paying job to working with the schools and attending college. “[The families asking for help] kind-of makes me feel strange, because I’m not a teacher,” she explained. “And here those people are trying to rely on me. I guess they saw me--how I had been changing, how I am being educated.” The parents saw in Rosa a member of their own community who had once been in a similar position as themselves. They felt comfortable approaching her because of their shared experiences and background. Rosa still struggled to herself as a person who could help them. “I don’t feel equipped or adequate. I’m not the kind of person that they need to go to for help. I was thinking I am not the person with the knowledge, but I know where the knowledge is.”



The idea of shared experiences infiltrated the EBAs' work lives. Because of their shared language and experiences, the EBAs were often the only ones in the school domain that could understand the EBs in such a profound way. Their unique understanding of the students simultaneously intensifies and mitigates their positions of marginalization. The EBAs are the ones who can communicate with the EB students, and the teachers sometimes ask the EBAs to relay information or ask them questions. As a result, the EBAs' position in the classroom becomes more marginalized because they are attached to a certain segment of the classroom, and are sometimes utilized only when the teacher needs something. In addition, the EBAs are expected to communicate the teachers' ideas without contributing their own perspectives. By repressing their own opinions, their positions as marginal members of the classroom are strengthened. At the same time, the shared experiences of the EBAs and the students mitigates their marginal positions. The EBAs possess a skill set and knowledge base that others in the classroom do not have, and therefore, they see themselves as valuable members of the classroom who contribute much to the educational success and confidence of the EB students.

Like bilingual paraeducators, the EBAs had many shared experiences with their students. They came from the same communities, shared a language and culture, and could identify with the frustration and fear of being second language learners. The EBAs reported that these shared experiences helped them to understand the students and showed them the importance of being a "bridge" to a new language and culture. Monzó and Rueda (2003) found that while bilingual paraeducators had

knowledge of the children's language and culture, they did not use it in instruction. The EBAs in this study, however, used Spanish as the language of instruction both during EB pull-out time, but also during informal "teaching moments" during the day. Monzó and Rueda (2003) also claim that the paraeducators' "funds of knowledge" in their study "served only to motivate" and was "not linked to learning" (p. 88). The EBAs' "funds of knowledge" served not only to guide instruction but also to motivate and support their relationships with students.

### Special Relationships

The EBAs developed special relationships with the students in the classrooms. The EBAs described the students as friends, and focused on getting to know them, making them feel comfortable in the classroom, and attending to their social and emotional needs. While they were concerned about the academic aspects of schooling, their focus on the other areas of the children's development allowed them to form special relationship.

The EBAs reported their relationships with the students as more than just a relationship between teacher and student. Gaby described all the students in the classroom as "*otra familia para mí* (another family for me)." She expressed an even more special connection to her EB students; "*Estas niñas, las quiero bastante, bastante porque no son mis alumnas, son mis amigas. Sí les he enseñado mucho, pero soy una amiga. Yo quería que ellas se sintieran a gusto platicando sus cosas conmigo.*" (These girls, I love them quite a bit, quite a bit, because they aren't my

students, they are my friends. Yes, I have taught them a lot, but I am a friend. I want them to feel comfortable talking about things with me.)” Gaby felt that it was not enough to attend to the students’ academic needs; she wanted them to learn, but she also wanted the students to feel comfortable and confident. According to her, the Mexican culture teaches women to be submissive and weak. She was trying to teach her two female students to be strong and independent. “*Yo quiero que ellas crezcan sabiendo que ellas pueden ser muy independientes con ellas mismas. Son fuertes y que no necesiten a ningun niño, ni algun nada para hacer las cosas que ellas quieren hacer.* (I want for them to grow up knowing that they can be very independent. They are strong and they don’t need a boy, or anything else to do the things that they want to do.)” From Gaby’s comments, it becomes apparent that she was concerned about more than the academic progress of her students.

The EBAs also expressed and demonstrated the need to see students as individuals and treat them accordingly. Penny mentioned that some “kids need to be eased into the day” while others need a “constant reminder” to behave appropriately. Gaby, too, noticed the differences in her students’ personalities, saying that “[*Una estudiante*] casi nunca se enoja. *Es una niña bien pasiva. Y la otra es todo el contrario.* [One student] almost never gets mad. She is real passive. And the other student is the complete opposite.)” Rosa also felt it was important to show concern for every child and for getting to know the children on an individual basis, “instead of just teaching them the ABCs.” She explained, “Once you have that special connection, it will help you do other things,” meaning that the students will be more

apt to learn and participate if they have a relationship with the teacher. Rosa also mentioned that by developing these relationships, the students would be more likely to confide in her. The EBAs focused on making the students feel comfortable and loved at school.

Penny also focused on making the students feel welcomed in the classroom. She said that she treated the children as she does her own children. She rubbed their backs at nap time because “I feel like they need that love.” She also said that she will try to talk to the students “on their level, eye-to-eye.” She recalled a time when a student was crying about coming to school. The teacher pointed her finger and said, “Don’t cry,” and the girl immediately started bawling. Penny said that she “got her away from all of that” and took the student to get the breakfast cart down the hall, telling her along the way, “It’s okay. You’re okay.” Penny was listening to the student’s emotional needs and responded by trying to make her feel comfortable in school.

During the course of the year, the EBAs sometimes discussed the students’ abilities and progress, but they mentioned their personalities, feelings, and needs more frequently, giving proof to the idea that their concerns about the children extended far beyond academic needs. They consider themselves to be teachers, friends, and confidantes. The classroom teachers seemed to notice these special relationships between the EBAs and the students and sometimes went to them for more information. For example, a classroom teacher asked Rosa if a particular student had told her anything about what happened at home the night before. These

special relationships helped to develop the EBAs sense of self-efficacy. They saw themselves filling a role in the classroom that the teacher could not because of time constraints, detached relationships, and language barriers. The EBAs saw that they had access to the EB students and reported that they could make a difference in their lives.

The EBAs felt that from the shared experiences with the students came special relationships. The EBAs tried to make the students feel comfortable and confident in school. In this study, the EBAs showed much affection and love to the children saying that they were “*familia*” and “*amigos*.” These findings are consistent with those of researchers Monzó and Rueda (2001a, 2001b, 2002). The EBAs also encouraged the students to talk about their families, problems, and stories, and they focused on building relationships with the students by listening, talking, and giggling with them. Valenzuela (1999) recognizes that this type of caring (listening to students and addressing their emotional and social needs) helps to validate the students’ culture and creates an education environment of success for Latino students. The findings in my study are consistent with those of other researchers in that bilingual paraeducators stressed the importance of establishing *confianza* or trust with their students (Monzó & Rueda, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Weiss, 1994). Frequently, the EBAs in this study followed the children’s conversations and asked them to elaborate, but Monzó and Rueda (2001b) found that the conversations that the students initiated with bilingual paraeducators about experiences outside of the school realm were rarely pursued. This difference is significant because it shows that the EBAs

understood the importance of oral language development, a topic that was discussed many times in professional development meetings. Therefore, it suggests that with greater training, the EBAs made conscious choices about the way they interacted with the students.

### Making a Difference

The EBAs saw that their job was valuable to the educational paths of the children with whom they worked and that they were making a difference in the lives of children. As Gaby expressed so well, “Speak[ing] two languages is the new world, the new future. We can start the future right now.”

The EBAs demonstrated their belief in the program by spending unpaid time preparing lessons and activities for their sessions with the students. I asked them to keep track of when they did their lessons plans. Ana wrote “at home on the weekends.” Penny wrote, “I do it at home the week before or during nap time,” and Gaby wrote, “*En la casa a veces, o en la hora de la siesta.* (At home sometimes or during rest time.)” Their effort and attention to developing high-quality plans demonstrate that they believed in the program and in its potential to change their students’ educational paths, and were willing to sacrifice free time at home toward lesson preparation.

Rosa demonstrated her belief in the program by lamenting the fact that it was a temporary program. She was disappointed that the grant lasted only three years and that EBAs had such a short amount of time to work with the kids. “Maybe there is a

reason that it is so short,” she said. “ We have to take advantage of every day—every minute that we are with the kids. God put us here for a reason. We have a chance to make a difference.” She said that even though they may be able to touch the lives of just a few students, those students would touch others who would turn touch others. She frequently compared her experience in the program to the movie, *Pay it Forward*, where one boy helps someone out and tells him or her to “pay it forward” or help another person. The EBAs saw that they were perhaps making a small difference to a limited number of students, but they hoped that those students would have the opportunity to one day make a difference in the lives of others.

The EBAs felt that the program was especially important for the EB students, who arrived to preschool without knowing English and had no one else to talk to. They said that the students were relieved and comforted knowing they had someone they could communicate with. They also mentioned that their presence in the classroom encouraged the EB students to make progress in English. Gaby noted that when students felt confident about speaking their first language, they feel better about themselves, and are more likely to try to communicate in their second. Rosa echoed these sentiments saying, “*Somos un puente* (We are a bridge).” By allowing the students to communicate with them in Spanish, the EBAs felt that the students would be encouraged to participate in the activities and use English more quickly. Rosa explained further, “If it wasn’t because we are there—the program—I feel like the student wouldn’t make it. Because she is so shy. She is smart enough to make it. If I was not there to encourage her, I feel like she wouldn’t make it.” Ana, too, felt like

the EBAs' presence in the classroom made a difference to the students; "I hope that they [the EBs] feel comfortable with themselves. I've noticed that they speak to each other in Spanish. I haven't really seen any teasing, which is good, because that means it's kind-of like normal." And Gaby described feeling that, "*A lo mejor lo que nosotros estamos haciendo no deja un gran cambio, pero si deja un gran cambio en cada uno de los niños.* (Maybe what we are doing is not going to create a big change, but it does create a big change for each one of the children.)

The EBAs also firmly believed that the program was just as important for the monolingual English speakers as it was for the EBs. Gaby explained, "*¿Sabes que? A lo mejor los niños no van a salir hablando bien el español, pero vamos a poner la semillita de interés. Por ejemplo, con lo que nosotros estamos haciendo ahorita, los niños van a interesarse en los idiomas.* (You know what? Maybe the children aren't going to leave speaking Spanish well, but we are planting a little seed of interest. For example, with what we are doing right now, the children will become interested in languages.)" Gaby mentioned that the children would hopefully continue to learn Spanish, not because they are required to study it, because they are interested in it now. She also said that some the parents of the monolingual English speakers were very thankful that their children were learning Spanish at such a young age. Ana also believed that the program was important for the monolingual English speakers. She felt that they had learned that "it's okay to speak Spanish" and said they showed an interest in Spanish and asked her questions.



In sum, the EBAs believed that their roles within the school domain were making a difference not only for the EB students, but for the monolingual English speakers. The students were becoming using a second language and revealed an interest in learning more. The EBAs also talked about the rippling effects of this program and how it could possibly influence even more people.

The EBAs reported beliefs about making a difference in the lives of their students is especially important to their increasing self-efficacy and empowerment. In their positions with this program, the EBAs came to a clearer understanding of their personal power to evoke change. Their feelings of self-efficacy increased as they saw changes in individual EB students, and how other students seemed more accepting of Spanish in the school domain.

### Barriers to Education

The Early Reading First grant offered the EBAs the opportunity to go to school at Washburn University with free tuition and books, and the chance to continue their own education was important for all the EBAs. But despite the opportunity for free schooling, the EBAs realized that paying for tuition was just one barrier to education to overcome. Ana, for example, enrolled in a class only to drop it soon after because of scheduling conflicts with work, buying a house, and unreliable daycare. Gaby also wanted to take advantage of the courses but needed a course that was offered only during her work hours. Penny enrolled in several classes, but later had to drop them because of challenges at home with daycare, financial problems, and transportation.

Although they were not able to continue their education at the university, the EBAs still believed that learning was important. Penny wanted to take a Spanish class because in her mind, “There are still things I need to learn.” Penny learned Spanish informally with her husband and coworkers, and her writing and speech were sprinkled with errors. In her autobiography for the family newsletter, she wrote, “*Si \*tu hijo habla \*Español voy \*[a] estar ayudando \*tu niño con su \*English y su \*Españal \*tambien. Si \*tu hijo habla \*English voy a enseñar \*tu como hablar \*Espanol.*”<sup>5</sup> Penny could verbally communicate in Spanish, but she saw that she needed to improve her Spanish skills for written communication with parents. In short, the EBAs showed that they saw learning as a valuable tool and that they needed to improve themselves to become better educators, even if they could not always take advantage of the free tuition for college classes.

Besides time and work issues, another barrier to college was the EBAs’ limited experience with higher education. Rosa’s case illustrates this barrier well, and so, is worth describing in detail. Rosa told me that she had dreamed about the day she could attend the university and that she accepted the position as an EBA only because she would have the chance to go back to school. She remembers the day clearly; “That night, I was so excited, I didn’t even get out of the car to go inside. I was thinking, ‘Wow! Washburn!’ I called all my relatives, my mom and my sister. I couldn’t wait to call and tell my mentor.” But despite her excitement, Rosa was also

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<sup>5</sup> The “\*” indicates words or phrases with errors in spelling, agreement, or word order or that have been omitted.

scared. Jerry, a tutor who Rosa had been working with for five years, shared with me a conversation he had with Rosa: “When she first talked about [college], she says, ‘I’m afraid to. I want to, but I’m afraid to.’ And I indicated that it would be difficult and she would spend much, much time studying and that she would have to apply herself like she never has before. And then I indicated that nothing worthwhile comes easy.” The support she received from Jerry pushed her, and she enrolled in her first college classes.

In September, I received a phone call from Rosa. “I’m sorry to call you,” she apologized, “but you are the smartest person I know. I need help.” Rosa faced her first college test the next week and was worried about the essay portion. She wanted help constructing an essay beforehand so that she could write one during the test. She had looked for help but ran into problems. “Most of my friends don’t speak English,” she said. “I tried to ask them to help me yesterday, and they didn’t know.” The following excerpts from my fieldnotes reveal Rosa’s educational challenges and demonstrate her desire for education:

We found a table inside coffee shop and spread out her books and notes. She was nervous about studying in a public space. She didn’t want to take a table away from customers. She kept asking me, “Are you sure it’s okay?” I reassured and said it was very common in a college town for students to camp out for hours at the same table. She noticed others in the room who were studying. “She’s been here for a really long time,” she said.

She settled down later in the day, when everyone else was reading, studying, or looking at their laptops.

I asked her questions and tried to force her to use specific nouns, the “American colonists” instead of “they,” and more vivid verbs, “demand” instead of “make.” We worked our way from the colonists’ loyalty to Britain to their protest and rebellion. At times we read the textbook, and she understood and even paraphrased. She used words like “oblivious,” “complacent,” and “discontentment,” but continued to see herself with a language and learning deficit.

As we worked, she said, “If I look away, I’m just trying to think, okay?” She said that she had trouble concentrating, but when I suggested we go somewhere with less noise, she said, “I need to make myself pay attention.”

She was excited to be back in school and taking steps toward a college education. The tears started to fall. “Even if I fail, it’s a triumph, because I tried my best, and I’m doing what I’ve always wanted,” Rosa said. “I’m not going to let it stop me.... But if I fail, at least I know that I tried my best.”

When Rosa got her test back, she brought it to the meeting. A big red C+ was written across the top, and she had a bright smile. She held up her test and said, “My first test in college.” She said that at first she wasn’t going to ask for help, but she needed to learn to write an essay. She said, “I’m proud of myself for asking for help.” She handed me a card and she had written,

“There is not enough words to say thank you for what you did for me! You are my Angel. BIG ANGEL! Thank you, Rosa.”

In October, Rosa had another test, but she didn't ask for help, because she felt she needed to learn to take tests on her own. She said, “My dream is turning into a nightmare. Is it worth it?” I reassured her that it was definitely worth it and shared how higher education had broadened my opportunities. My excitement transferred, and Rosa lit up with a smile and with renewed energy. The next week, Rosa came in with a smile and her last test and midterm grade, a B. The doubting Rosa of the previous week was gone, and she said, “I can do this now. It is worth it.”

This experience with Rosa was revealing in several ways. First, when Rosa faced a struggle in the classroom, she felt comfortable asking me for help. Through professional development meetings and classroom observations, we had built a relationship, and she felt supported, both in her work and on her educational path. Those in her circle of family and friends were unable to help her in this educational step, and so she turned to me. This shows that the support from the program was not just limited to her professional role in the classroom.

Second, the incident reveals that Rosa recognized her weaknesses and what she must do to progress. When she said, “I need to make myself pay attention,” Rosa was trying to control and monitor herself. Instead of letting the environment overwhelm her or asking to go somewhere quieter, Rosa focused on what she could do, an indication that she used self discipline to overcome her problems. This

analysis is supported by other incidents in which Rosa focused on self-improvement. She actively tried to change her thoughts about tests by attaching a hand-written note to her book: “A test is the opportunity to show what I have learned.” She enthusiastically accepted my suggestions for more language-focused activities after a classroom observation and said, “I’m so glad you’re here,” and “I really want to learn.”

The incident also revealed that while Rosa tried to rise above her father’s low educational expectations for her, she still carried remnants of it. Despite her accomplishments, Rosa doubted her abilities and was afraid of failing. She had completed the G.E.D. program in two and half years, attended and graduated from a vocational school, and was now attending college; yet she still clung to her father’s negative expectations. Rosa later said her father had taken her out of school in first or second grade on December 16; the day remains chiseled in her mind. She said he told her, “Education [isn’t] important for a woman,” and that “a woman [is] just going to grow up, get married, and have babies.” As a child, Rosa watched other children go to school, and when her brothers came home, she took their books and read. She said that maybe not being able to go to school as a child was what drove her to further her education as an adult. Rosa said that taking classes was an opportunity to show her dad. “He said that I wasn’t going to amount to anything.” She said she rarely talks to her dad now but had told him about her work with the grant and about her classes. She reported that he had said, “I’m proud of you.” She sighed and shook her head; the irony was not lost on her.

Over the course of the year, Rosa's desire to continue her education seemed to strengthen. As she gained more experience at success, her confidence grew. She began to connect what she was learning in her courses to the preschool classroom. For example, she learned from psychology class that "sometimes what you have to do is focus on all the good things that they [the students] are doing and ignore the bad." She tried to do that in the classroom when she felt that a boy was already learning to give up and feeling like a failure. Rosa expanded her educational goal and began to dream of one day getting a Ph.D., but she said, "Even if I know that I was never going to get there, I will still continue to learn, because it's the love I have for learning. I find myself always so starving for learning. I always feel like I'll never have enough. It's not about getting the Ph.D." In the first year of the grant, Rosa had taken steps towards her educational goals and earned 16 credit hours from Washburn University.

The education that the EBAs received during the year was not limited to the college classes; they reported that they were learning in their position in the schools, as well. Gaby mentioned that the classroom had become her classroom and the teacher had become her teacher. Ana also remarked, "I'm learning so much." She described her job as an EBA as "such a blessing" because of all she was learning about teaching. In addition, all of the EBAs mentioned the monthly professional development seminars and the weekly meetings as times when they were able to learn more in the process of improving their teaching.

## Discussion

The data presented thus far tend to reflect trends in current research about bilingual paraeducators. We see that the roles of EBAs, like other bilingual paraeducators, vary from classroom to classroom and they serve both as additional instructional staff and clerical support. In addition, my findings are consistent with that of other researchers in that teachers collaborate with the bilingual paraeducators to varying degrees. Like other bilingual paraeducators, the EBAs have shared experiences with the students and are able to form special relationships with them. Unlike other bilingual paraeducators, however, the EBAs report a network of support where they can share ideas, voice their concerns, and learn. The EBAs also report that in their roles in an additive bilingual program, they are making a difference in the lives of the students. Lastly, the EBAs face a number of barriers to education, and although they are offered the opportunity to attend the university, for all but one, the challenges are too great.

Where most studies end, this study begins. I wanted to do more than learn about the EBAs' roles and challenges in the classroom; I wanted to understand not only the unique skills they bring to the classrooms, but also how their experiences in the classrooms transform what they believe about language, education, and themselves. I was in the unique position to know the EBAs when they were first beginning their jobs and I observed the changes over time in their beliefs and practices. I also wondered about the collateral consequences of the EBAs' involvement with the grant, and so I wanted to explore whether these changes



extended to their families and friends, changing their way of thinking or urging them to seek higher goals. The next chapter, then, is a continuation of the story of the EBAs toward these goals.

In it, I will explore the EBAs' personal and family challenges, support systems, the intersection between home and school, their changing beliefs and practices, and perceived efficacy. These areas of focus add a more holistic view of the lives of the EBAs and provide a deeper understanding of the unintended consequences of an additive bilingual program.

## CHAPTER 5: PERSONAL LIVES OF EBAs

The professional and personal aspects of the EBAs lives are not codified segments; instead they intersect, intertwine and separate with no clear boundaries. These four women arrived to work bringing the traditions, beliefs, and backgrounds of their own families, formed in their own experiences. Over the course of a year, the EBAs told me stories about how their own lives and their friends and families' lives were changing partly because of their involvement in the program. Through this study, I attempt to explore how these two worlds intersect and transform each other.

In this chapter I describe four themes that emerged from the observations, and interviews with regard to the personal lives of the EBAs: (1) personal and family challenges, (2) support systems, (3) changing beliefs and practices and (4) perceived efficacy. I then discuss the EBAs' future plans. The data presented in each of these categories is interpreted through a framework centering on Freire's (1984) of "empowerment" and Bandura's (1982; 2001) "self-efficacy." I argue that the program's effects on these four EBAs had far-reaching consequences beyond simply their professional development. More specifically, the program influenced their attitudes towards language and education, motivated their families and friends to dream of more, and helped the EBAs realize their own value as educators and agents of change. The conceptual framework along with data allows for a deeper understanding of the transformation that these women experienced, both professionally and personally.

### Personal and Family Challenges

The EBAs experienced several family or personal barriers to performing their jobs, including family care, personal finances, and relationship woes. In the first week of training, for example, Penny's baby got sick, and the daycare provider called to have her picked up. The program director permitted Penny to bring the baby and her three-year-old son to the meeting, where the older boy scattered papers, markers, and puppets across the floor. When the kids were sick later in the year, Penny asked to bring them again. The EBAs encountered a gauntlet of germs in their daily interactions with preschoolers, and I decided they should not be exposed to sick kids unnecessarily, so Penny missed the meeting and a day of work. Later that month, Penny's daycare provider "skipped out" on her and she had no option but to stay home. "My husband can't take care of the kids, because he is a cook at a restaurant, and there's no one to take over for him. Other people have their husbands to help them out," Penny explained. "Well, I have him for other things, but not to take care of the kids during the day. He's gotta work." After three months of unreliable daycare, Penny was tired of missing work. She had not received her full check in more than a month, and she kept repeating, "I'm so frustrated." When another EBA, Ana, recommended a school-based daycare, Penny enrolled her children there.

Each time Penny called to report that she was staying home, she said, "I'm so frustrated," or "I don't like missing so much work." Penny recognized that she missed many days of work because of challenges at home, and that these absences affected her job. She said, "I could have got fired in any other job, because I've

missed so much. Anywhere else would not even give you another chance. And just that has helped me a lot.” She was concerned about her paycheck but also about not servicing the students. She worried especially when she missed going to one of the classrooms four weeks in a row because of sick kids, unreliable daycare, Thanksgiving vacation, and meetings. Her concerns about missing time in the classroom reveal that she believed that her role in the classroom was a valuable one. The findings of this study were consistent with those of Waldschmidt (2002), who found that bilingual instructional assistants encountered barriers related to finances, family issues, and childcare. Unlike other research though, this study documents the EBA’s response and solutions to these challenges.

During the year, Penny and her husband decided to separate for a time. When she told me about their decision, she said that he was changing her and making her a different person; he was taking her away from God, her family, and “He was taking me away from me.” Penny had a bright smile and said that she and her children were going to be happier. She said that she was going to try to focus on herself and get herself back.

Penny said that during her difficult times, she did not want to talk to people at work about her personal life. She explained, “I don’t like to bring my personal life [to school]. That’s why I don’t like to have problems in my work life, because I have enough in my personal life. I don’t want to bring in my bad mood to make you in a bad mood.” Penny’s comments show that while she intentionally tried to keep her

family and work lives separate, she was unable to do so because of the challenges at home that naturally infiltrated her performance at school.

Penny also said that through all of her problems at home, “I supported me. I did it on my own really.” She said that for the most part she also liked to keep her personal problems away from her family too, because “when you have a big family, you gotta know how to find your resources and know who is not going to leak on you.” At the same time, her family helped her out by taking care of her kids sometimes. From these comments, we see that Penny is independent and tries to solve her own problems, but also relies on the support of her family.

Ana, the other mother in the group, also struggled to balance work and family life. At the beginning of the year, Ana agreed to work 19 hours per week. After about one month, she realized that she needed more time to take care of her kids and her family’s errands. She and her husband had just bought a house, and she couldn’t keep up with everything. She asked to reduce her hours to 13 hours a week, giving her two more days off each week. She later asked to adjust her schedule again because she needed time to take her son to school in the mornings.

Although Gaby did not struggle with finding daycare or balancing her family and work life, she was concerned about finances. The EBAs were mistakenly told that they would have sick leave, but a closer reading of their contracts disproved that. When Gaby was sick for a week and realized she wouldn’t be paid, she began to worry. She said, “*Yo contaba con los sick days. Aunque son pocos días.* (I was counting on the sick days. Even though they are just a few days.)” Gaby still worked

part-time at a fast food restaurant on the weekends, but she had started looking into other jobs, too. A friend offered her a job as a bilingual bank teller for \$11 an hour with *beneficios*, insurance and sick days. Gaby decided to apply, but she tried to figure out a way to stay with the program while also fitting in the new part-time job. “*No me quiero ir* (I don’t want to go,)” she said. Eventually, she decided that what she was learning as an EBA outweighed the money she could make elsewhere.

The EBAs consistently expressed frustration with trying to find the balance between work and family. They wanted to work but also had family issues to take care of at home. Even though they were paid at least \$4 more per hour than other paraeducators in the district (who made \$7.90 per hour), they struggled without a benefit package. In all three situations, the EBAs tried to make adjustments and solve their problems while continuing to teach. Penny looked for more reliable daycare, Ana shortened her schedule, and Gaby looked for supplemental work. Although they ran into problems, they persisted and tried to find solutions. The EBAs not only hoped that their situations would change, but they also actively worked to change them. The challenges they experienced in balancing a career with family obligations provides one example of how the EBAs’ professional and personal lives intersected to the extent that they were not able to separate them. Their attempts to solve the problems illustrate not only their commitment to their job, but perhaps also their growing sense of empowerment developed as a result of their participation in the program.

The EBAs' personal and family challenges are particularly important to their self-efficacy beliefs. Bandura (1982) explains that one of the sources of information for self-efficacy is an individual's physiological state, because stressful situations debilitate performance. In other words, a person is apt to expect success when they are not anxious, worried, or sick. In the EBAs' situations, their personal and family challenges may have weakened their self-efficacy beliefs. For example, when the EBAs arrived at the classrooms thinking about daycare, transportation, and financial challenges, they were not mentally positioned to expect success in their jobs. At the same time, Bandura mentions "enactive attainments" as the most influential source contributing to self-efficacy beliefs. Essentially, when an individual experiences success, his or her self-efficacy beliefs increase. Then, applying the concept to the current study, each time the EBAs were faced with a challenge at home and were able to solve it, their perceived self-efficacy increased. Therefore, the EBAs personal and family challenges may have initially weakened their self-efficacy beliefs but then later strengthened it.

### Support Systems

In their professional roles in the school, the EBAs received support from some classroom teachers, members of the EB team, and their program coordinators. Outside the domain of school their support came from family, friends, mentors, and church. They found support for themselves and also for the EB program.

*Support from Families and Friends*

Although the EBAs' home lives presented challenges, they also provided much support, beginning when the EBAs first learned about the position with the grant. Some of them admitted to me that they were initially scared to apply and then, once offered the position, they wondered if they actually had the skills to be successful. With the support of their friends and family, however, they ultimately accepted the position.

This support is especially evident in Gaby's case where after coming to the United States, she felt her dreams stagnate while she worked at a fast-food restaurant. Gaby had studied at a leading private university in Mexico but resigned herself to earning near minimum wage for seven years in the United States. She recalled to me that a friend had told her about the EBA job and brought her the application. Gaby filled it out just to satisfy her friend, but she recalls telling her, "*¿Sabes qué? Yo creo que no voy a entrar en este trabajo. Es que no puedo. Ellos necesitan alguien que de verdad sea bilingüe.* (You know what? I don't think that I am going to take this job. I can't do it. They are looking for someone who is really bilingual.)" She said that she even tried to call me several times to tell me that she was not interested in the job, but that I never gave her an opportunity to speak. "*Cada vez que le llamaba me comprometía más. Sí me entiendes?* (Each time I called you, I became more obligated. You know what I mean?)" In an interview, Gaby's sister recalled when Gaby learned of the job: "*Gaby me dijo que estaba muy nerviosa, pero a la vez estaba contenta, entusiasmada. Y yo le animaba. Le decía, 'Sí, Sí. Ve. Es buena*



*oportunidad para un trabajo. A lo mejor puede ser una gran oportunidad.* (Gaby told me that she was really nervous, but at the same time she was happy, excited. And I encouraged her. I told her, ‘Yes, Yes. Go.’ It’s a good job opportunity. Perhaps it could be a great opportunity.)” All of Gaby’s family and friends who were interviewed remembered encouraging Gaby to accept the position. Gaby reported that her friend in Mexico also encouraged her by saying, “*Estás mena si no lo agarras. Mija, puedes hacer muchas cosas. Ya me estás acobardando. Eso no es de ti.* (You’re a dummy if you don’t take it. Girl, you can do many things. You’re getting scared on me. That’s not like you.)” So, although Gaby was afraid to make a job change and did not think that she had the skills necessary to work in the classroom, with the support from her family and friends, she decided to take a chance and was ultimately successful in landing the job.

Rosa’s encouragement to accept the position as an EBA came from her tutor and friend, Jerry. She told him about the position and in an interview, he described that day: “She indicated that she might have an opportunity that she wanted to take advantage of, but she wasn’t confident enough to think about it seriously. And I saw it as an opportunity that she should not pass up, because she could not only help children grow, but she could grow tremendously herself.” With Jerry’s support, Rosa decided to accept the position because of the opportunity to go back to school. At the end of the year, she jokingly described their relationship; “I’ve promoted him through the years. He started out as an English tutor, and then he became the technical school tutor, then he became the math tutor, and then he became the

counselor, and then he become the psychotherapist, and now you become—you see, I promoted you—you become the Washburn tutor.” From Rosa’s joke about Jerry’s promotions, we see that she was accomplishing her goals with the continual support from her friend and tutor.

In interviews, all four of the EBAs mentioned the support and encouragement they received when they first heard about the job. Their families and friends pushed them to accept it, even though they were nervous and did not believe they had the skills to do it. If they had not received this support, the EBAs may have never imagined the position for themselves. I suggest that while the EBAs’ family situations sometimes created burdens for them in their new jobs, the support of family was also integral to them achieving upward mobility in their occupations. Most of the EBAs had never held a “professional” job with so many responsibilities before; they had worked in restaurants, fast food, and assembly lines. Even Rosa who had worked as an ESL tutor for a semester had not been expected to make lesson plans or use her own creativity and knowledge to provide instruction. The EBAs’ previous work experiences help to explain their lack of confidence in doing the job, but at the same time a sense of pride in “doing something with their lives.”

### *Family Support of Program*

Besides encouraging the women to apply for and ultimately supporting their decision to accept the position as an EBAs, all of the EBAs’ friends and family members who were interviewed reported that they supported the program goals (of

helping both monolingual English students become bilingual and of helping Spanish-speakers maintain their Spanish while learning English). This support, I argue, further impacted positively the EBAs' perceptions of the job and their motivation to do the job successfully.

The support of the program from the families and friends of the EBAs covered a variety of topics, from the students being able to communicate with a larger number of people, getting better jobs, maintaining their ties to their heritage, and contributing to society. Penny's mother was an advocate of the program because, "You can mingle more with other people if you know other languages." Ana's husband remarked that knowing two languages would not only help all students later in the job market, but would also help the EBs identify with members of their family and develop home ties. Taking another angle, Rosa's mentor Jerry commented that, "I think it's a pride situation in that those kids would want to continue to want to learn and maintain their Spanish, because it's their heritage." Gaby's friend from Burger King talked about how it was good for the Spanish-speakers to learn the language well when they are young, so they would not forget it later on. Gaby's parents were supportive of the program, "*Conocer dos idiomas,*" her father told me, "*es lo mejor que se puede dar a una persona, verdad?* (To know two languages is the best that you can give a person, right?)"

This support of the program and the understanding of the program goals that the EBAs' friends and family describe, I argue, transferred to the EBAs' performance in the classroom. Through all the challenges of the program, they were boosted by

the knowledge that the work they did was important and had long-term effects on the children. Perhaps, if their families and friends opposed the program, it would have been easier to give up when times were difficult.

The support from the EBAs' friends and families can also be viewed according to its effects on their self-efficacy beliefs. Essentially, the EBAs were continually being persuaded by their friends and family that what they were doing was important and that they were making a difference in the lives of the children. Bandura (1982) explains that this verbal persuasion contributes significantly to an individual's feelings of self-efficacy.

### *Church*

Another source of support that all of the EBAs mentioned was church or a relationship with God. As part of the visual and narrative method of data collection each of them decided to take at least one picture of a church to help describe what was important to them. Penny explained that she took a picture of the church because "that's where a lot of my time goes during the week." When I participated in activities with their families, three invited me to a church service or to church activities. Throughout the year, the EBAs consistently mentioned how they were praying and receiving support from their respective churches and how this spiritual guidance helped them overcome the day-to-day challenges that they faced.

Gaby specifically discussed with me how her religion and the issues that she had with Catholicism as it was practiced intersected her profession. She believed that

the Catholic Church and the Mexican culture teach women to be submissive and to obey certain rules, to have “*una vida tapada* (a sheltered life).” She explained how Mexican women who are mistreated or abused are often told, “*Es tu cruz*. (That’s your cross.)” or “*Así lo quiso Dios*. (That’s the way God intended.)” But Gaby was against those traditional beliefs and stated that she firmly believed women should be taught to respect themselves and “*los demás las van a respetar* (and others will respect them).” She felt these beliefs “came with her to school” as she tried to teach the students to be strong and independent. Gaby and the students shared a common culture and religion, and she was trying to teach the students to not follow it blindly, but to question it and discover what they believed. In this situation, the church or religion was not just a system of support, but also the impetus for subtle lessons in the classroom.

### Intersection of Home and School

By getting to know the friends and family of the EBAs, I was able to explore how the personal lives of the EBAs revealed themselves in the classroom. I saw similarities in the ways in which the EBAs behaved with their families and in the classroom. Specifically I noticed the focus on oral traditions, community, and encouragement.

When I visited Gaby’s family, Gaby, her father, sister, and friend, and I sat around the table while the mother was checking on dinner—*molé*, *pollo adobado*, y *arroz*. The father told Gaby to get out the books about their hometown of Jerez,

Zacatecas, México. They spread them out on the table and Gaby's father explained what the people were doing or described the buildings. From the kitchen, Gaby's mother made a few comments about Mexico too. We sat around the table to talk and eat, and when Gaby's four brothers came home, they took the seats around the table and ate. There were several conversations going on at the same time, one at the table, in the kitchen, and around the kitchen island. The conversations merged and intertwined, and separated again. Afterwards everyone sat or stood in the kitchen and dining room and told jokes one after another, producing waves of laughter among Gaby's friends and family.

Gaby's family demonstrated a strong oral tradition. From the moment I walked in the house, the family was talking, laughing, and asking questions. Gaby carried this same quality with her when she went into the classroom. She talked to the students about what they did on the weekend, what they liked, what they could do. She put on a bright yellow wig and tossed her head, and asked them how they liked her new look. She teased the girls in their pink "Princess" T-shirts and "*Yo soy la princesa*" became a standing joke between them. Gaby emphasized the importance of "*comunicación con los niños* (communication with the kids)." She asked the students questions and tried to explain rather than demand. The focus on oral language development in the classroom seemed to come naturally to Gaby, partly because she had experience with it with her family and did not know any differently.

From interacting with Penny's family during an afternoon picnic, I saw that her idea of community and teamwork stemmed from her family. She has four sisters,

and several have blended families. The kids ran between the picnic tables and the park, and the sisters watched out for all of them. Penny said that her sisters help each other out and take care of each other kids. Penny mentioned that her son is learning from this network of people; “He is learning so much from so many people, not just from me. Good and bad, and I got to steer him away from the bad.” Within the grant, she noticed that all the teachers, paraeducators, and EBAs needed the teamwork and support too. She said, “This is a big teamwork job. It shows people how to work as a team. It should show them, and if they don’t know how to work together at the end of this, then I don’t think they’ll ever know. You are not just always on your own. You’re not just always making it for you; you are helping other people make it too, you know?” Even though Penny faced many challenges in the classroom, she believed that the EBAs, teachers, paraeducators, and grant coordinators were all part of a team, working to help the students to success.

The most significant thing about meeting people who are important to Rosa is that she believed that her life had been changed by a number of people along the way who helped her achieve her potential. She wanted me to meet her tutor who helped her to read, write, and speak English. Jerry said that they had been working together and “After a time, she said this is too difficult. I can’t do what I want to do. And a tear came to her eye. I said, Rosa you are a talented young lady, and you can do anything you set your mind to.” When she was at a low point and told herself, “Dreams are not for you,” and Jerry encouraged her; “One step at a time, Rosa. One step at a time.” Rosa talked about how important Jerry’s support was: “Just the fact

that he's here pushes me. Even if he doesn't even say one idea—Knowing that someone is there is what is keeping me going. I don't know if it's [because] I cannot get enough confidence in myself to do it. That someone else is there believing in me is what keeps me going, or that gives me the confidence.” Rosa believed that she could be that catalyst for change in the students' lives. She said, “We have a chance to make a difference. We are the ones who that are going to help them have a chance. We are the ones who can give them a chance.” It becomes apparent that the person that Rosa wanted to be for the students is the same person that Jerry and others like him were for her. Rosa talked about a time when she was in the classroom working with a student. Rosa knew the student knew the answer and she encouraged her to raise her hand and tell the teacher. She remembered, “That was the first time I saw her raising her hand. I feel so proud of her. She did it. She couldn't speak English, and she was struggling. And then she did it.” Rosa also mentioned that she wanted to make sure the students left preschool with confidence.

From these three meetings with the EBAs' friends and family, we see that what they bring to the classroom is not just a shared language and culture with the students. They bring their own values about independence, community, and helping others. We see how their personal lives creep into the classrooms and influence how they work with the children and teachers.



### *Language Ideology*

The EBAs revealed their beliefs about language throughout the year and during the interviews. Through their actions and their stated beliefs, they demonstrated what they believe about bilingualism and their language ideologies. When I met and interviewed their families and friends, I saw how their beliefs and practices influenced their language at home, and also how what they brought to the classroom was informed by their home life.

The weekly EBA meetings were usually a systematic mixture of English and Spanish; Rosa, Ana, Penny, and I spoke mostly English, except when we were talking directly to Gaby, and Gaby almost always talked to everyone in Spanish. Sometimes Rosa and Gaby would talk to each other in Spanish and then Rosa would turn to me and continue on in Spanish. She would suddenly notice she was speaking Spanish, stop herself, and say to me, “Why am I talking to you in Spanish?” She said that when she saw me (a Non-Hispanic White), she had to speak English. I decided to experiment and conducted the meeting several times in Spanish to see what the EBAs would say. Rosa said that she felt more comfortable talking to me in English because I am *güera* (a person fair or light-skinned). She also said that in all of her years in the United States, she had never met a *güera* who could speak Spanish, and now when she looked at my face, she had to speak English. Essentially, Rosa’s basic code for language preference was: *güera* means English. Rosa’s code carried over into the classroom as well. She said that she plays with all the kids during center time, but with the monolingual English speakers, “Obviously I am not speaking Spanish to

them.” She will tell them “*una pequeña frase*” like, “*Hola. Ven acá.* (Hi. Come here)”, but she admits that she does not speak much Spanish to the non-EB students.

Rosa’s language choices demonstrate a challenge of additive bilingual programs. She believed that it was important for the Spanish-speakers to leave preschool with a strong foundation in English and Spanish, but she unconsciously put limits on her expectations for the monolingual English speakers. She mentioned that the “You are in America, speak English” mentality was already ingrained in the preschoolers’ minds as she struggled to teach them more than basic vocabulary. From these incidents, we also that Rosa’s personal experiences with language influenced her expectations in the classroom.

The EBAs also revealed their language ideologies related to Spanish. Gaby explained, “*Muchas de las personas que inmigran aquí, de los niños que tenemos en los salones—ellos hablan un castellano muy pobre. Los niños crecen con un inglés y con un español muy pobre, muy pero muy, muy pobre. Por ejemplo, muchos de los niños con quien a veces yo estoy, dicen, “patas.” No es la palabra correcta. Un padre que enseña un buen castellano te va a decir que eso se dice pies. Patas, las tienen los animales. Entonces yo creo que es muy bonito que nosotras estemos allí en los salones, porque por lo menos—a lo mejor yo no sé mucho inglés, pero yo sí sé mucho español. Estamos poniendo un granito pero es demasiado grande. Porque estamos enseñando un buen español.* [Many people who immigrate here, of the children we have in the classrooms—they speak very poor Spanish. The children grow up with a very poor, but very very poor Spanish. For example, many of

children I work with say, “*patas* [slang word for foot].” It’s not the correct word. A parent who teaches good Spanish will tell you that you say feet. *Patas*. Animals have them. So, I think that it’s nice that we are here in the classrooms, because at least—maybe I don’t know a lot of English, but I do know a lot of Spanish. We are putting a grain of sand, but it’s really big. Because we are teaching good Spanish.)”

Gaby’s family reflected the same language ideology. With her sister we talked about some of the words that people in Mexico use until her sister finally said, “*No debe burlarse uno de—al contrario ayudarlos, verdad? No todos somos iguales. Muchos hablan bien. Otros hablan mal.* (One shouldn’t make fun of—but help them, right? We aren’t all the same. Many people speak well. Others speak poorly.)”

This example of language ideology is significant because it demonstrates that family members share similar beliefs and attitudes about their language and these carried over into the classroom as Gaby decided what to teach the children and made conscious decisions about correcting mistakes when the children talked. Through this discussion, we see how the EBAs’ personal experiences and views of language became part of what they teach in the classroom.

### *Changing Beliefs and Practices*

The information collected in the interviews and observations reveal two major changes in language practices. While all the EBAs showed an increased understanding of second language acquisition and teaching practices, Penny and Ana also changed their attitudes and practices with regards to their own language use.

This is significant because of ongoing professional development and discussions, they questioned their practices, which suggests that the process of empowerment and self-efficacy involves access to information.

Penny, as a case in point, changed her practices related to language development. The first time I observed her in the classroom, she was making a play-dough pumpkin, and a girl sat next to her making something else. Neither one talked. The second time I went to the classroom, Penny talked to the children about their pig projects, asking them if they were going to color the pigs' ears or if they were going to put lots of mud on them. Penny said she had learned that "if you're not talking (to the students), they can't talk back." After participating in professional development and observing modeling, Penny became more proficient at providing language input for the children.

Penny's instructional modification more closely resembled, in fact, the way she talked to her own son; "I've always had conversations with him. If something is wrong we are going to talk about it. If something is right, we are going to talk about it. If something is great, we are going to praise it. We have always talked." Penny did say though that she was learning how to teach her son Spanish; "With this job, I am trying to learn how to teach. So, it helps with him [my son] too. He is opening up and saying more words. And I am just trying to teach him more words." Her job as an EBA showed her not only why it was important to teach her children Spanish, but also the tools she needed to do it.

Ana's changing attitude about language involved her growing use of Spanish and the domains in which she chose to speak in Spanish. At the beginning of the year, sometimes Gaby would speak to Ana in Spanish and Ana answered in English or many times she would begin in Spanish and quickly switch to English. Ana explained how she felt, "I appreciated Spanish, but I needed some encouragement. Why should I continue speaking two languages? Why is it important, you know? Before sometimes, I didn't want people to know that I knew how to speak Spanish, because they look down on it." Gaby too noticed that Ana did seemed uncomfortable using Spanish sometimes, but saw a change during the year. Gaby said, "*Al principio no se sentía muy confiada en que era el español. ¿Sí me entiendes? Y ahorita ve algo bien diferente de lo que es el español. Lo habla más. Lo ulitiza más. Entonces era una parte de ella que no sabía que era especial—como era algo bueno.* (At the beginning, she didn't feel very confident about Spanish. You know what I mean? And now she sees something very different about what is Spanish. She speaks it more. She uses it more. So it used to be a part of her that she didn't know was special—that it was something good.)" The change in Ana's perspective of Spanish was not just visible to others, but to herself as well. She said, "I think that you guys [Dr. Jorgensen and I] really, really believe that it's okay to speak Spanish, you know? I think that it is neat that you guys have embraced that and to me, you guys are supportive, being Anglo and everything. That really helps me and gives me encouragement. Now, I feel like it's okay to have two languages. I should just continue doing both languages." Ana said that being a part of the team and seeing the

other EBAs' perspective on Spanish helped her; "I feel support from the team in that we all really want to keep Spanish alive. All of us do. They just see how important it is." Within an environment where bilingualism was supported and encouraged, Ana was able to discover a new perspective of her own language.

During the year, Ana's beliefs about Spanish in her own life changed, but she also saw changes in her beliefs about the language for her own children and the students. During Ana's interview for the EB position, she said schools should focus on teaching English instead of helping students maintain their home language. She only spoke English to her own children, even though her husband wanted them to be bilingual. Ana said that she was forced to go to ESL classes in elementary school and had felt "singled out" for speaking Spanish. Members of her family were punished for speaking Spanish at school, and she wanted her children to learn only English. Within two months, and with intensive professional development, Ana was beginning to change her perspective about bilingual education. "I'm learning so much," she said. She also described her job as an EBA as "such a blessing," and she started teaching Spanish to her own children.

Ana's husband could also sense a difference in Ana since becoming an EBA; "Her whole perspective of the program has changed. At first she didn't feel that it was warranted. You know, why do they want to do this? Why do they want to reinforce their Spanish skills? And now she has a more positive outlook on it. I guess, she sees the benefit." Ana's husband mentioned that Ana being involved in the grant had changed the language in their house. Before they used Spanish as a code

language to talk about things without the children knowing, but recently they had been talking more in Spanish. Her husband could also see a difference in their children; “It does have an effect on the children too, because our son is asking, ‘How do you say this in Spanish?’ I think that’s a positive thing. I really want all my kids to learn both languages really well.”

Ana talked to her parents and aunts about the EB program and said that they were really happy that the children were being encouraged to speak Spanish. She explained, “They grew up in a time where they were told not to speak Spanish. I guess in some ways they have been kind of oppressed. People [were] like picking on them or getting mad at them for speaking Spanish. I think to them [my parents and my mother-in-law], this grant is kind of like liberating. They probably wish they had one when they were kids, you know. Because they would have felt more positive about themselves, I think. And more comfortable.” Ana’s observations about her family and their excitement about the grant suggest that the program means something to members of the community who have suffered from the negative stigma of speaking Spanish in the past. While the program does not make up for what they experienced as students themselves, they were glad that these preschool students were not punished for speaking Spanish, but rather were encouraged to use it.

Ana’s new perspective of bilingualism influenced more than just members of her family. She began to use Spanish with the children whose parents attended the English class at her church. Though the children came from Spanish-speaking families, she could see that they were already starting to lose their language and

replacing it with English learned in school. She borrowed puppets from the classroom so she could start “doing what we do here” at her church, meaning teaching the children both English and Spanish. Ana said that she often encouraged members of her family and church to continue speaking Spanish to their children. She also reported telling them about articles we discussed in the weekly EBA meetings which showed that children who maintain their home language do better in their studies and develop a healthier self-esteem than children who do not maintain their home language.

Ana reflected on the change in her view of bilingual education: “I think that politics gets in the way of my thoughts. I would just think some weird thoughts, like ‘How come some people who come from other countries don’t want to learn English?’ And now when I think about it, it was kind of biased, you know? I was just thinking one way and not thinking from their perspective—that maybe some of them do want to learn English, and they want to keep their own language. And that’s okay, you know? They have the right to do that. I think that grant puts things more in perspective and I agree with the whole idea to keep everybody’s language up, because that is going to help them. And it’s going to give them a better self-esteem. I understand better. I do.”

Rosa also tried to extend the goals of the grant beyond the classroom by telling her former students’ parents the importance of home language maintenance. When she noticed that the children spoke to the parents in English, she would ask the parents about right away, “Have you been helping her to keep her language?” She



talked to them about the benefits of keeping their language; “Do you realize that when they grow up, how are you guys going to communicate? You cannot speak their language and they cannot speak yours. And if you decide to go back to your country, how are they going to communicate? They don’t have the language. And they say, ‘Wow, I never thought about that.’” Rosa’s case illustrates ways in which the grant reached into the community, informing people’s decisions about language.

The EBAs were not the only ones to extend the goals of the program—even Gaby’s mom encouraged Spanish-speaking parents to continue Spanish with their children: “*Ya les he dicho a señoras en el trabajo, [que dicen], ‘No, que mis niños hablan puro inglés.’ [Les pregunto], ‘¿Y porque no le enseñan su idioma?’ Y dicen, ‘¿para qué? Que aprenden puro inglés.’ Y digo, “No, es una ignorancia suya. (I have already told women at work [who say], ‘No, my children speak just English.’ [I ask them], ‘And why don’t you teach them their language?’ And they say, “What for? They should just learn English.’ And I say, ‘No, that’s ignorance on your part.’)”* While it is unknown if Gaby’s mother always felt this way or if conversations like these stemmed from her daughter’s work in the grant, we see how the beliefs at home reflect the research and topics that the EBAs discussed during professional development meetings.

### *Influences on Family and Friends*

Besides the changes in their beliefs about language and their practices, family members and friends of the EBAs suggested to me that the program had an influence

on them with respect to their actions and plans for the future, suggesting a kind of “ripple effect.” These collateral consequences reveal that the EBAs’ experiences and growing knowledge about bilingualism influenced those around them.

Gaby’s case illustrates this well. Both Gaby’s sister and friend mentioned that they felt more motivated to go back to school or get a different job since Gaby had begun her new job and started taking college classes. “*Yo la veo que está contenta y que va a su trabajo a gusto y contenta,*” her sister related. “*Sí, me motiva.* (I see that she is so happy and that she goes to her work so pleased and happy. Yes, it motivates me).” Gaby also reported that her boyfriend not only encouraged her to take the position, but also that her studies and advancement made him rethink his own future and his decision not to go to college, telling her, “*No está bien que tú estés progresando y yo me quedo.* (It’s not okay for you to be advancing and me just to stay the same.)” In other words, seeing her involvement in something new and seemingly important motivated him to want to continue his education and build a different life for himself.

Penny’s sisters said that they have been learning from Penny since she had become part of the program. Her oldest sister informed me that Penny taught her how to “relax” with the kids and about “positive ways” for working with her own children. Penny’s family also mentioned that Penny seemed more motivated and happier, and seeing her encouraged them to do new things, as well.

Rosa’s participation in the program seemed to mean just as much to her tutor Jerry as it did to her. Jerry said that he had wanted to go to college but had to work

instead to help his family. “I always wanted to teach and when I retired, that idea came back to me.” After years of working with Rosa, he saw that she now had the opportunity to go to college and teach herself. He reflected, “I think it [working with Rosa] is probably one of the most memorable experiences of my life. I didn’t know about personal satisfaction, but I derived quite a little bit of personal satisfaction from my friendship with Rosa. Her character qualities of compassion, concern and understanding are unique. And she deserves every opportunity that she has.” He elaborated,

Rosa has contributed quite a little bit to my life too. I’m an old guy and all I got is time. And I don’t have much of that when you put it in the context. At any rate, I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and Rosa’s friendship has been therapy for me. A guy can think too much, ‘Woe is me.’ I really enjoy spending time with Rosa because she gets me into a frame of mind where I am thinking positive all the time. So it’s not one way help. You give a little bit and I give a little bit.

After the interview with Jerry, Rosa and I talked for a bit. She was surprised, “He is very rational and I was kind of uncomfortable that he was crying. I never saw him cry. But in a way, I feel like it makes me feel better. Because sometimes I’m like, ‘Why is he helping me?’ And now I realize that this is helping him too. He wanted to go to college and he didn’t get the chance for whatever reason.”

It seems that when Rosa was able to go to college, Jerry finally had his dream come true too. Jerry and Rosa formed a reciprocal relationship in which they helped

each other, and Rosa realized that reaching her potential allowed for those around her to achieve a sense of efficacy as well. As Rosa became more aware of her own skills, knowledge, and talents, she empowered others.

### *“Standing Up”*

In the interviews and fieldnotes, the theme “standing up” kept recurring. The EBAs felt that they had to defend themselves, the program, and their language. They also felt that they needed to teach the students to do the same. “Standing up,” I argue, connotes the growing confidence and empowerment that these four women developed over the course of the year through their participation in the program and illustrates further the ways in which their professional experiences and a growing understanding of linguistic justice merged into their personal lives.

In the classroom setting, Penny mentioned that, like the other the EBAs, she had had to stand up for the program to the classroom teachers with whom they worked. She explained that at first the teachers did not understand the program well and resisted making Spanish a part of their schedule. “We have kind of had to just push ourselves in there and take a stand, because at first they didn’t know what we were. So it was a new year and a lot of teachers didn’t know what’s going on yet, so we just kind of had to stand up for ourselves and say no [to the teachers’ resistance to incorporating Spanish lessons].” Penny reported that she also tried to teach the students and her own son to stand up for what they believe, something that she learned from her dad. Penny’s take-a-stand attitude was something that she and Gaby

both tried to instill in their students and they described how they encouraged their students to be strong, independent, and to think for themselves so they could later stand up for their beliefs. In a previous vignette, we saw how Gaby encouraged her students to think about what they believed, rather than to blindly accept the rules of a church or culture.

Outside of the classroom, Rosa remarked that she had to defend the program to people in the community that she encountered. When someone asked her “Why is the government spending so much money on those illegal immigrant kids that are eventually going to go back to their country?” Rosa stood up for the program and said, “The issue is not whether they are legal or illegal.” She said what is most important is that they are children and they deserve an education, and she said, “We should fight for what is right.” Rosa’s sense of justice was further reflected during one meeting when the EBAs and I discussed several paintings from Dr. Christian Faltis, a professor of bilingual education and applied linguistics at Arizona State University. They talked about how teachers must do what they believe is right, rather than do the things that are considered “right” by others.

Rosa also noted that throughout the year she was learning becoming to be more “assertive.” She described the Rosa at the beginning of the year as “being afraid of the teacher, being afraid of power. Whether I like it or not, they have more authority. And I’m learning to believe that even if people have more authority, that shouldn’t stop us from trying to speak up.” She said that she felt she had to stick up for the EBs in the classroom and be an advocate for them.

The theme of “standing up” was found both in the EBAs’ personal and professional lives. Within and beyond of the classroom, the EBAs encouraged their students and own children to stand up for themselves. More significantly, the EBAs mentioned that they learned the importance of “standing up” in their own lives from their family members or from their expected roles in their culture and as members of the church. The current literature does not explore the topic of the bilingual paraeducators “standing up” for what they believe or for the rights of the children to be educated. The only reference to the bilingual paraeducators’ beliefs comes in the form of discussions about their relationships with students.

#### Looking towards the Future

The changes that the EBAs saw within themselves over the course of the year, as illustrated above, were related to their beliefs about language or bilingualism, to their willingness to take a stand for what they believed in, and to their growing appreciation of their roles and the impact that they had on children. Another theme that arose with regard to the effects of the program on their personal lives and self-perception pertains to their views about their futures.

Gaby, for one, realized that she enjoyed teaching and wanted to continue in the educational field in the future. She said that she liked the difference that she could see in the kids and she wanted to learn more. As she explained, “*Antes no era maestra, pero ahorita ya soy. Soy el único que [los estudiantes] tienen. Pues, lo tengo que hacer y lo tengo que hacer bien y tengo que dar lo mejor que puedo*

(Before I wasn't a teacher, but now I am. I am the only one that they [the students] have. So, I have to do it and I have to do it well and I have to give everything that I can)." Gaby's perception of herself as an educator had gone from feeling that "...*no era la elegida para este trabajo*" (I wasn't the one for this job) to recognizing that this job was now "*mi vida* (my life.)" It pleased her to think that she could pursue positions, like her new summer job working with a preschool classroom at a community agency, that she would never have considered before in her seven years in the United States.

While Gaby became more interested in her teaching, Rosa seemed to question her previous plans of becoming a classroom teacher. "I used to think that I wanted to be a teacher. I was so discouraged about the things I had seen in the classroom. I don't think I want to become a teacher, because they get so focused on the ABCs that they don't have time to look at the human side." Still, Rosa admitted that she would feel "empty" in another occupation. She said, "I know how much I love these kids. This job is not an 'I have to—;' it's 'I love to—.' If I force myself to go a different direction because of discouragement, I know that I am going to be missing something." Although Rosa was sometimes discouraged, she felt that she could one day find a way to interact with students and let them be who they are while also teaching them. She planned to return to the EB program in the fall and to continue to take advantage of the tuition assistance offered by the grant.

For Ana's part, she acknowledged that through the grant she learned how to be a better mom. She said that she got ideas from the meetings that she could use to

teach her kids more. After one particular professional development seminar focusing on oral language development and the importance of conversations, Ana said, “It’s really coming together now. I feel really dumb with my own kids, and I’m going to start talking to them.” While Ana wanted to continue with the program, she was going to stay home to welcome a new member to their family. In May, she said she was sad to leave the group and that she was surprised it affected her so much to have to leave her job.

Penny also saw many differences in herself throughout the year. At the end of the year, she told me and Dr. Jorgensen, “I couldn’t see the good things about myself until you guys helped me see them.” She had accepted a position at her son’s daycare and would not be returning to the program. Neither would she be returning to wait tables at a restaurant or to an assembly line job. The most telling evidence of the influence of the program and her experiences comes in the form of an email that she sent to both Dr. Jorgensen and me [unedited]:

To my Guiding Angel

I am really going to miss you so very very much I appreciate everything you have done for me and I will always remember all of your comfort and support you have given me. I don't think I would have finished this school year without you. Your motivation and passion for this program and for your fellow amigos and more so the children .....wow! If I was even half of the person you are, I would still be remarkably talented and kind and strong woman.



From the bottom of my heart I thank you! I will keep in contact I promise. Oh yeah, I am going to be a lead teacher a my children's daycare instead of an assistant!!!! I will also sneak in some Spanish lessons

Sincerely,

Penny

### Discussion

In summary, through the words and actions of the EBAs, it is clear that the experience in the EB program changed their lives. It made them realize talents, interests, and skills that they never knew they had. It either sparked or renewed an interest in a future in teaching. In their positions, they felt they could make a difference for the students, defending them and supporting them at the same time. Most importantly they saw the power of a small group of committed individuals.

This thesis extends current literature by examining the lives of the EBAs outside the realm of school. Previous research has given only brief mention to the family challenges that bilingual paraeducators face as they return to school (Waldschmidt, 2002). Yet, they do not explore the relationship between these paraeducators' home and school lives. This thesis is an attempt to elucidate this relationship and explore how the EBAs' experiences are mutually transformative. I also examine how the elements of empowerment and self-efficacy extend beyond the classroom and into the personal experiences of the EBAs' families and friends.

In this chapter, I have presented a number of challenges that the EBAs face as they try to balance family and work obligations. We have seen how they have handled these situations, becoming stronger with each new challenge. As Bandura's (1982) describes, self-efficacy in part stems from having completed tasks successfully. As these women handled their challenges in their home lives, I argue that their perceived self-efficacy in the school realm also increased.

In their lives outside of school, the EBAs found several systems of support. They reported that their friends and families encouraged them to accept the position as an EBA, and also supported the program goals. Within the concept of self-efficacy, Bandura (1982) states that verbal persuasion helps in the formation of self-efficacy beliefs (p. 126). Even when the EBAs believed they could not succeed, their families and friends urged them to try. When they saw they were providing a valuable contribution to the classroom, their beliefs in their power to make a difference strengthened, and they in turn became more empowered.

In this chapter, I also described specific examples of the intersection between home and school in the lives of the EBAs. We see that the EBAs talk to the students in the same ways that they talk to their family members. They show *cariño*, but also listen and allow the students to express their ideas. This is the basic principle of Freire's (1984) *conscientização*, in that to be empowered, individuals must have the chance to "dialogue with the people about their view and ours" (p. 85). The EBAs saw that the even preschoolers must be given a chance to talk about what concerns them.

The intersection between home and school is also apparent in what the EBAs expressed as “making a difference.” In this section, we saw that the EBAs, especially Rosa, wanted to empower and build the self-efficacy beliefs of the students in the same way that others had done for them. In other words, becoming more successful and achieving their goals made them want the same for their students. I mentioned the theme of making a difference in the discussion about their professional roles, but here we see how those ideas are informed by their personal experiences.

Also in this section, I explored the expressed and observed language ideologies of the EBAs and their families. Part of the self-efficacy beliefs of the EBAs was rooted in the fact that they could provide language assistance to the EB students. More than just serving as a “bridge” to English, the EBAs expressed that their presence in the classroom was important because they were teaching the students “*un buen español* (good Spanish).” The EBAs reported satisfaction that they were able to teach the students Spanish in a way that their parents or other members of the community could not. Undoubtedly, by recognizing their unique skills and knowledge set, the EBAs developed an increased sense of self-efficacy.

The changes in beliefs and practices relate to Freire’s (1984) concept of empowerment in that some of the EBAs needed extra encouragement to use and feel comfortable with Spanish. Freire explains, “The oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires. . . . When they discover within themselves the yearning to

be free, they perceive that this yearning can be transformed into reality only when the same yearning is aroused in their comrades” (p. 32). The case of Ana’s changing view of Spanish is similar to what Freire describes. She had become convinced through the tradition of assimilationist views commonly expressed in the United States that Spanish was not necessary. Through the program, she connected with others who had the same yearning to use and value Spanish, and by expressing these views through the weekly EBA meetings and taking action in the classroom, Ana’s yearning to appreciate and feel comfortable with Spanish was transformed into reality.

In this section, I also explored the how EBAs’ involvement with the program influenced their families and friends. In the described cases, we see that the EBAs’ families and friends became more motivated to go back to school or find different employment. We also see that the EBAs’ successes in the classroom and in their own education was significant for those around them. Bandura (1982) explains this phenomenon by stating that vicarious experiences raise one’s own self-efficacy. Essentially, when individuals see others achieve their potential, it motivates them to reach their own.

In this chapter, I reveal the EBAs’ notions of “standing up.” Freire (1984) states that when individuals gain knowledge, they become better positioned to challenge the status quo and transform it. In the same sense, through ongoing professional development and a dialectic process, the EBAs became more informed about the benefits of bilingualism and were more apt to “stand up” for it. They faced

challenges both within and outside the classroom, but they were committed to the goals and tried to enter this dialectic process with others.

The final section of this chapter discusses the EBAs' immediate future plans. All four of the EBAs expressed interest in continuing in the educational field. In the classrooms, they had success in teaching the students, and just as Bandura (1982) describes, these enactive experiences (based on authentic mastery experiences) are the most influential source of self-efficacy. In their experiences in the classroom, they realized that they were effective teachers and contributed the students' education that others could not.

In sum, throughout the course of the year through their involvement with the EB program, the four EBAs increased their self-efficacy beliefs by successfully completing tasks, entering a dialectic process with their colleagues, families, and friends, and gaining knowledge. They became more empowered to change their own circumstances, and in the process empowered both their students and those in their personal lives.

## CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### Discussion

In chapter four, I explored the professional roles of the EBAs, including their various duties, challenges, support, relationships with students, and barriers to education. In chapter five, I entered the domain of the EBAs' home lives to understand their challenges, support systems, and their changing beliefs and practices, the collateral consequences on their families and friends, and the notion of "standing up." As part of the discussion of these themes, I have presented an analysis through the lens of empowerment and self-efficacy. Although many of the findings about the EBAs in the school setting are consistent with current research about bilingual educators, this ethnography makes a contribution to knowledge by providing a more holistic view of the lives of the EBAs.

### *Convergence with Current Literature*

The data gathered for this study and the resultant ethnography suggests several similarities in the roles of the EBAs to those of bilingual paraeducators in general. First, the roles of the EBAs, like those of their bilingual educator counterparts vary from classroom to classroom, but usually include instruction, and other duties such as preparing materials, supervising during lunch or recess, and interpreting, (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Sandoval-Lucero, 2006; Rueda & Monzó, 2002; Weiss, 1994). Second, although both EBAs and bilingual paraeducators made valuable contributions to the classrooms, sometimes teachers did

not value or recognize or utilize their unique skills sets (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Nieto, 2002; Rueda & Monzó, 2002; Sandoval-Lucero, 2006). The EBAs felt they were in inferior positions with less control and decision-making opportunities than other teachers. Like bilingual paraeducators, the EBAs felt in some classrooms, they did not work as partners with the teachers (Rueda & Monzó, 2002). Third, both bilingual paraeducators and EBAs found that some teachers who were willing to collaborate, which increased their self-efficacy beliefs. This is consistent with the findings of Sandoval-Lucero (2006) who found that paraeducators who worked in cooperation with teachers developed higher levels of self-efficacy, leading to higher education and upward mobility within education. Fourth, both EBAs and bilingual paraeducators are charged with the task of making education accessible to the emerging bilingual students because they speak their common language (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006). Fifth, the findings of this study are consistent with those of researchers in that both EBAs and bilingual paraeducators have the opportunity for small group instruction that is relaxed and informal (Monzó & Rueda 2001a, 2001b, 2003). Sixth, EBAs and paraeducators were found to work in the “leftover spaces” in the schools and had to deal with a number of distractions during instructional times (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Nieto, 2002). Seventh, EBAs and bilingual paraeducators reported and were observed to have special relationships with the students that focused on *confianza* or trust (Monzó & Rueda, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Weiss, 1994). The data suggests that the EBAs share many of the same professional

roles as their bilingual paraeducator counterparts; however, there were clear differences as well.

### *New Insights*

The roles of EBAs depart somewhat from their bilingual paraeducator counterparts in the extent of their autonomy in the classroom, use of Spanish, support, and involvement with an additive bilingual program. First, compared to their counterparts, for example, the EBAs in this study were given the freedom to help design, develop, and implement an additive bilingual program, taking into consideration the various schools in which they worked and the specific needs in each classroom. Unlike the bilingual paraprofessionals that Rueda and Monzó (2002) studied, the EBAs I worked with did more than simply carry out the plans of the teacher; they had to put their own creativity and knowledge into the lessons. And although the lack of a rigid plan may have caused some confusion and even frustration, the EBAs knew that they were hired and valued for their unique contributions to the classroom.

Second, the EBAs differed from bilingual paraeducator in their use of Spanish in the classroom. Researchers found that bilingual paraeducators did not use their knowledge of the children's language and culture in instruction and that Spanish was only used to motivate students (Monzó & Rueda, 2003). The EBAs in this study used Spanish to motivate, but more importantly as the language of instruction both during EB pull-out time, but also during informal "teaching moments" during the day.



Third, though current research superficially discusses the support that bilingual paraeducators receive from the classroom teachers (Rueda & Monzó, 2003; Sandoval-Lucero, 2006), the literature leaves a gap in whether they are receiving support from their peers or supervisors. This study makes a valuable contribution to the literature by exploring this facet of the EBAs' professional experiences. The EBAs reported that their colleagues offered support and encouragement throughout the year. They stated that the weekly meetings and the monthly professional development meetings were sources of information, ideas, and team building. This study also reveals the importance of support systems outside the school realm. In addition to the support from the EBAs' colleagues and supervisors, the EBAs received support (or verbal persuasion borrowing the terminology of Bandura's modes of influence in self-efficacy) from their families and friends, and religious groups. As demonstrated, these support systems do not work in isolation, but rather inform and influence each other.

Fourth, this study suggests that the intersection of home and school covers much more than we may realize. I was able to interview a very small number of people in the EBAs' lives, but just within those circles it became apparent that EBAs' involvement in the program was influencing their lives, motivating them to achieve their own potential. As the EBAs described, this program touched their lives, and they in turn touched the lives of others. We see these influences in the lives of the EBAs, as they introduce us to their new perspectives of language, bilingualism, and education.

Fifth, this ethnography extends the research by exploring the personal experiences of the EBAs as they completed their professional duties in an additive bilingual program. To date, little research has been published with this focus and as such, my findings are presented toward the goal of addressing this gap. Additive bilingual programs are so fundamentally different from ESL programs in which most bilingual paraeducators work, and the effects of such a program, I argue, reach the lives of the EBAs in a way that an ESL program cannot. For example, in ESL program, the bilingual paraeducator is not affirming the importance of Spanish, she is acting to replace it with English. On the other hand, in the EB program, the EBAs encourage the students to use and value Spanish, and in the end they walk away benefiting from these objectives as well. They begin to feel more comfortable with Spanish and stand up more frequently for their language. By working with a program that respects their language, they become empowered, which leads to greater self-efficacy and further empowerment.

In summary, this study suggests that when bilingual paraeducators are valued for their contributions to the classroom, supported through ongoing professional development, and actively involved in a dialectic process, the effects of an additive bilingual program reaches far beyond the classroom. Not only do the students learn about the value of their culture and language, but so do the EBAs and those around them. In the end, as the EBAs reach for their potential, they encourage others to do the same.

*Ethnography as a Tool*

This study does more than present new findings about EBAs in an additive bilingual; it demonstrates how ethnographic methods can be used to explore areas of education and understand what educational experiences mean for those involved. The various methods of collection (including interviews, observations, and the use of visual narratives) allow for a deeper and wider understanding of the lives of the EBAs. In addition, using Geertz's (1973) "thick description," the research process including analysis and conclusion becomes less mysterious. The benefits of this method, extend into the presentation of the data and findings, as the EBAs present their lives in their own words, reaching a more "dialogic" discourse (Clifford, 1988), in which the words of both the researcher and the informants are voiced. In this process, the EBAs and I have shared the writing of this thesis, leading to greater self-empowerment and efficacy as demonstrated below.

As part of the interview process, I asked the EBAs what they had learned by being involved in this study. I had shown them an early draft of the paper, had conducted several interviews with them and their families and friends, and listened as they talked about the pictures they took as part of this study. When I showed them a draft of the paper, Rosa held the paper close to her and said, "I learned my life is important. This made my year." Penny said, "It's good to hear bad things about you, because you can learn. Because not everything in the paper was good." While she did not specify the "bad things," I think she meant that it was difficult to read about the many personal and family challenges she experienced. The EBAs

expressed that being a part of the study helped them learn more, and they hoped the work could help someone else. Rosa commented, “When you wrote the paper—I know it’s kind-of dumb—but it makes me feel kind of important. I am part of something. I am influencing someone’s life, what I do, what I learn, what I speak is affecting someone’s life and other people can see it and other people can even admire some of the things I have. I couldn’t see it before you wrote the paper. And when you gave it to me, I thought I was special. It helped me feel that I am part of something, that I am important. I am touching people’s lives.”

### *Limitations*

Like all research, there are a number of limitations in this thesis. First, due to the sampling size and the program design being an additive bilingual program (rather than a “subtractive” ESL program) the findings may not be generalizable to bilingual paraeducators in general. Second, my position as a researcher serving in a quasi-supervisory role may have influenced the EBAs to reveal some information while not divulging quite everything. At the same time, the extent and duration of the research aid in overcoming this limitation. Third, the influence on the EBAs’ families and friends and vice versa seems difficult to demonstrate without an additional longitudinal study or without studying each family member and friend more in depth. As is, I was only able to interview a few members and interact with them for a relatively short amount of time. But while these conversations were just a portion of

the larger picture, they were useful in their explanatory power of the collateral consequences of empowerment and self-efficacy.

### *Implications*

Through this thesis, I have analyzed the EBAs' professional and personal experiences with an eye on self-efficacy and empowerment. Ideally, this research makes its own contribution by providing information to other programs employing bilingual paraeducators. Towards these ends, I make several recommendations based on my research. First, in the EB program, the EBAs were given the freedom to help design and develop a program; they were valued for the unique contributions that they made to the classroom. This suggests that bilingual paraeducators should be viewed as valuable members of the classroom and encouraged to collaborate with teachers. Second, EBAs reported having an established support system with their colleagues, with those in similar positions and with similar challenges as themselves, which suggests that the bilingual paraeducators must be given the opportunity to collaborate with other paraeducators. Third, the program offered sustained and varied professional development. The EBAs attended weekly professional-development meetings that were designed to provide them with a comprehensive understanding of language development and second-language acquisition. Therefore, the final recommendation is that in addition to collaboration with teachers and paraeducators, bilingual paraeducators would benefit from ongoing and intensive professional development covering diverse topics related to education.

## Conclusion

The EBAs' perspectives of their world in an additive bilingual program revealed both challenges and triumphs. Challenges were evident in their family and personal lives as they struggled with finances, reliable daycare, and negative past experiences and expectations. These challenges combined with those in the school, including teacher resistance, marginal positions, inadequate classroom conditions, and scheduling concerns. Despite all the challenges, the EBAs' perspective also told a story of hope. The support and encouragement offered to them by their friends and family evidently served to mitigate the challenges they encountered. The EBAs were increasingly confident in their ability to effect change, not only in their own lives but that of their students and families. They believed in the program and in the power to change the educational paths of their students and themselves. The knowledge gained from ongoing professional development, colleagues, college coursework, and researchers encouraged them to take steps to overcome challenges so that they could imagine and create an educational system that respects bilingualism and language diversity. While teaching the students to value their language and education, the EBAs reinforced the idea within themselves.

Finally, because the grant will fund the EB program for another year, I am fortunate to have the opportunity to continue my work with EBAs and to further investigate the extent to which their participation in the program influences the teachers, students, or parents' views of language or bilingualism. Naturally, I would

want to explore how the EBAs' feelings of self-efficacy and empowerment evolve with more experience and knowledge.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix A: Sample of Topics for Weekly EBA Meetings and Professional Development Seminars*

- Orientation and job description
- Language assessment administration and scoring
- Discussion about Tabors' (1997) and talking to parents about home language maintenance
- Discussion of presentations at the National Association for Bilingual Education Conference, 2008
- Discussion of Dr. Christian Faltis' paintings and pictures presented at the National Association for Bilingual Education, 2008
- Writing lesson plans
- Connecting language assessments to instruction
- Importance of play
- Idea sharing for instruction
- Reading skills of English Language Learners
- Oral language development
- Building vocabulary
- Immigration discussion
- Educational differences between Mexico and United States

*Appendix B: Informed Consent for EBAs*

Dear Bilingual Assistant:

We are the educators and researchers working you, the bilingual assistant and the children in your classroom via the Early Reading First grant. As part of our job we are working to make sure that the Spanish-speaking children are adding English, while maintaining Spanish, as part of their preschool experience. It is important to us that the support we are providing you during professional development and classroom visits is working to meet the needs of all students. In addition, we are interested helping you gain more classroom experience and knowledge. Towards these goal, we ask your permission to include you in a research project.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to learn about the roles of you as a bilingual assistant, your use of language among peers and with the students, and your attitudes towards bilingual education and your own educational trajectory.

**Procedures and Confidentiality**

To begin this research project, we would like to videotape you and your students during your regular classroom activities for about 45 minutes per week. We also ask that you complete a confidential survey regarding language and practice. Your name and identity will not be disclosed to anyone outside the research team. In addition, the ethnographic method (including both formal and informal interviews) will be used to collect information about your language preference, educational trajectory, and your roles in the classrooms. The questions for the formal interview will emerge from the informal interviews and observations.

**Risks and Benefits**

There are no risks associated with this research. The benefit will be to you, the bilingual assistants, teachers, and students as we learn the best way to meet the needs of all children and educators.

**Participant Certification**

I have read and received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email [dhann@ku.edu](mailto:dhann@ku.edu) or [mdenning@ku.edu](mailto:mdenning@ku.edu).

Completion of this form acknowledges your understanding of the study purpose and your participation as described above.

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Signature

Date

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact a member of the research team:

Karen A. Jorgensen  
karenj@ku.edu  
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Early Reading First  
University of Kansas  
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444 J.R. Pearson Hall  
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1122 W. Campus Road  
Lawrence, KS 66045

*Appendix C: Informed Consent for EBAs' Families and Friends*

Spanish

Estimado miembro de la familia o amigo:

Soy maestra que trabaja con las asistentes bilingües en la escuela. Como parte de mi trabajo, les brindo a ellas información cada semana acerca de la enseñanza de los niños. También paso tiempo en los salones de clase apoyándolas en su trabajo con los niños.

Quiero entender mejor el papel que las asistentes bilingües tienen en sus vidas profesionales igual que en sus vidas familiares. Le invito a participar en un estudio que dará una perspectiva más completa de la vida de las asistentes.

El propósito del estudio

El propósito del estudio es conocer y entender las experiencias personales de las asistentes bilingües. Cada asistente llega a su trabajo con sus propias ideas, experiencias, y habilidades. Por medio de observar y conocer a sus amigos o miembros de sus familias, quiero explorar el vínculo entre sus experiencias personales y su trabajo en el salón.

La información que colecto ayudará a los demás (los maestros, los padres de los estudiantes, y la administración) entender mejor las habilidades únicas que las asistentes provienen a los salones. A lo largo, ayudará a todos a tomar mejores decisiones a beneficio de todos los asistentes y estudiantes.

El procedimiento y la confidencialidad

Para este estudio, me gustaría observar o participar en una actividad con las asistentes bilingües y sus familias o amigos. Las asistentes escogerán una actividad que ellas quieren compartir conmigo. Con su permiso grabaré la conversación para poder escucharla y transcribirla después. La información que recibiré se considerará confidencial.

Los retos y los beneficios

No hay riesgos relacionados con este estudio. El beneficio es para las maestras, asistentes bilingües, y los estudiantes mientras aprendemos la mejor manera de cumplir con las necesidades de todos los niños.



**Permiso de participación**

He leído este formulario de permiso. Si tengo preguntas, puedo llamar al (785) 864 – 7429 o (785) 864-7385 o escribir a Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email [dhann@ku.edu](mailto:dhann@ku.edu) o [mdenning@ku.edu](mailto:mdenning@ku.edu).

Mi firma comprueba de que yo consiento voluntariamente en participar en este estudio.

Nombre: (Escribe su nombre con letra de molde) \_\_\_\_\_

Firme \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

Si Usted tiene preguntas, favor de comunicarse con:

Lonna Summers lonnasue@ku.edu Graduate Research Assistant Early Reading First University of Kansas Department of Curriculum & Teaching 443 J.R. Pearson Hall 1122 W. Campus Road Lawrence, KS 66045
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## Informed Consent for EBAs' Families and Friends

### English

Dear Family Member or Friend:

I am a teacher who works with the emerging bilingual assistant in the school. As part of my job, I provide information to them each week about teaching. I am also in the classrooms and support them with their work with the children.

I would like to better understand the role that the emerging bilingual assistants have in their professional and personal lives. I invite you to participate in a study that will give a more complete picture of the assistants' lives.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to be exposed to and understand the personal experiences of the bilingual assistants. Each assistant brings to her job her own ideas, experiences, and abilities. By observing and meeting the assistants' friends and family members, I want to explore the link between her personal experiences and her work in the classroom.

The information I collect will help teachers, the students' parents, and administration better understand the unique abilities and knowledge that the bilingual assistants bring to the classroom. Ultimately, the information will help all involved in the grant to make decisions that will benefit both the assistants and students.

#### Procedure and Confidentiality

For this study, I would like to observe or participate in an activity with the bilingual assistant and members of her family or friends. The assistants will choose an activity that they would like to share with me. With your permission, I will record the conversation to be able to listen to and transcribe later. The information that I collect will be considered confidential among members of the research team.

#### Risks and Benefits

There are no risks associated with this research. The benefit will be to the classroom teachers, bilingual assistants, and students as we learn the best way to meet the needs of all children.

**Participant Certification**

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. If I have any questions, I can call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email [dhann@ku.edu](mailto:dhann@ku.edu) or [mdenning@ku.edu](mailto:mdenning@ku.edu).

My signature verifies my voluntary consent to participate in this study.

Name: (Please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions, please contact:

Lonna Summers lonnasue@ku.edu Graduate Research Assistant Early Reading First University of Kansas Department of Curriculum & Teaching 443 J.R. Pearson Hall 1122 W. Campus Road Lawrence, KS 66045
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*Appendix D: Interview Questions for Families and Friends of EBAs*

1. Do you remember when the EBA first told you about this job? What did she say about it? What was your reaction?
2. Have there been any differences in your house (language, discipline with the children, activities) since the EBA began working with the program?
3. Have you noticed any differences in the EBA since she began working with the program?
4. Have you noticed any differences in anyone in the family?
5. What do you think of the program's goals of encouraging students to be bilingual?
6. Describe your days together as a family. What do you do?
7. When you are together, what language do you speak? Why?

*Appendix E: Instructions for Visual and Narrative Method of Data Collection and  
Interview Questions*

*Instructions*

Researcher: We are going to look at the pictures you took to describe what is important to you or show who you are. Try to put a caption to each picture, describe the picture, and then tell me why you took the picture. There are two copies; you will keep one set and I will keep one.

*Questions*

1. What picture do you wish you would have taken? Why?
2. Do you think you have changed this year? In what ways?
3. Have you been supported this year? In what ways?
4. Who is your support at home?
5. What did you learn from this process of taking pictures and being involved in this study?